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"YOUR FATHER DOES NOT UNDERSTAND—DOES NOT BELIEVE THE TRUTH," SHE REPLIES, IMPATIENTLY.

ROSALIND.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"FORHAM! all change here!" shouts the guard, rousing me from the uneasy slumbers into which I have been jolted by eight hours of railway travelling.

Am I, then, the only passenger to this dark, dreary, deserted station, on this dark, dreary, September night?

Not quite, it appears, as I let down the window and look for a porter to take charge of my traps. I see a lady step lightly from the adjoining carriage and engage that functionary in earnest conversation.

Apparently there is only one porter at this benighted place. So I also descend, and slowly approach, in order to secure the reversion of his services. Thus, as the lady's voice, though low, "an excellent thing in woman," is unusually clear

and distinct, I cannot avoid overhearing what she says.

"No cab at all to be had to-night! Are you sure?"

"Quite sure, ma'am."

"But how is that? I never had any difficulty in getting one here before."

"Why you see all the cabs belong to the 'George,' and there's a ball going on there to-night for young Mr. Escourt's coming of age, and you couldn't get one of them cabs—ah! not for double fare and a pint of beer in—"

Pleasant hearing for me, with five or six miles of *terra incognita* between me and my destination, and a heavy portmanteau, gun-case, hat-box, and rugs to boot!

"What shall I do?" exclaims the young lady. "What am I to do? I must get to Maple Hill to-night, and I cannot possibly walk."

"No, miss! More particular as the road's partly under water since these here rains," assents the porter, cheerfully.

This gets interesting.

"Excuse me," I interpose, advancing, "but I think I heard you mention the place to which I am bound. Do you mean to say," to the

porter, "that I can get no conveyance to Maple Hill?"

The lady starts, draws her ulster more closely round her, and readjusts the veil she had put aside while speaking to the man.

"Not as I know of, sir!" is the encouraging reply.

"And is there no omnibus—no vehicle of any sort?"

"There's a carrier's cart, but that started two hours ago," says my friend, sardonically.

"Well, I must go to this 'George' of yours and see for myself whether anything can be done," I observe, after a moment's consideration. "Just get my traps together, my good fellow, and show me the way out," then turning to the young lady, I add—"If I can get hold of any sort of vehicle I hope you will allow me to offer you a seat in it, as our destination seems to be the same!"

She hesitates a little; she is evidently most unwilling to adopt the suggestion; but at last she replies, in those deliciously clear, soft tones,—

"Thank you very much. I seem to have no alternative."

"Indeed, I do not think you have."

Perhaps my tone involuntarily betrays a little softness at her mode of accepting my overture, for she adds impulsively as I am about to turn away,—

"Oh! I did not mean to be ungracious; only I so much regret your having a stranger as it were forced upon you—and—and we cannot tell what inconvenience it may lead to."

"I will run all risks," I reply, charmed out of my ill-temper by her pretty earnestness, but a little puzzled by her mysterious foreshadowings. "One is always glad of a companion in misfortune, you know."

Forham is not so large or so busy a town that its chief inn is difficult to find out, especially on this important night.

I soon found myself on the steps of the "George Hotel," quite brilliant and unmistakable, with its gay garb of scarlet foot-cloth, striped awning, and many-coloured lamps. A ball is evidently a great event in these regions, and one to be made the most of in every way.

I enter the hall of the inn, and at once am made to feel myself a nuisance and an anachronism. What earthly business has a damp, mud-bespattered bird-of-passage in the "George" on such a night!

Everyone is much too busy to take any notice of me, and while I am vainly trying to get attended to, a carriage sets down a party of evidently exceptional importance, and I stand aside for a moment to let the new arrivals pass.

An elderly lady and gentleman come first; she tall and angular, gorgeous in green velvet and diamonds—he round and rubeund, and doing his best to look jovial and at ease in the hideous uniform of a Lord-Lieutenant.

Behind this couple come a tall, narrow-shouldered and aquiline-nosed and short-sighted young man, faultlessly got up by his tailor, but in much tribulation with his eye-glass, and on his arm, a vision—a concentration—an embodiment of all beauty.

I am conscious of floating lace, and of shining satin, and gleaming pearls, and aiken, flower-crowned hair.

Something requires arranging in the glistening draperies, and she stops a moment, turning slightly towards the spot to which I have retreated, and then

"A face flashed like a symbol on my face, and shook with silent rapture brain and heart."

I am transfixed—subjugated. There is nothing in the world for one wild moment but that face, and myself.

Only for one moment, and then my wandering senses are rudely recalled.

"We are most preposterously early," says the young man, pulling impatiently at an almost invisible moustache.

"How very absurd to come to a dance just when one ought to be peacefully drinking one's claret."

"We are obliged to come early. It would not be etiquette, you know, in these regions to open a ball without Sir John. I think it's great fun."

"Glad you do, I'm sure; and how long do you suppose we shall be required to stay?"

"Till the very last dance," she replies, composedly. "Sir Roger, most likely. Did you ever hear of 'Sir Roger de Coverley'?"

"Ah, yes! Think I've seen it on the boards somewhere. Daresay I can make it out with you," he adds, trying to throw a sentimental infection into those last words, and dropping his voice with an expressive glance which makes my fingers tingle to punch his head.

By this time the dress is adjusted, and they cross the hall together, and disappear up the wide staircase.

And I stop to pluck up a japonica blossom, bright but scentless, which has fallen from her hair, and hide it, like a fool as I am, in my pocket-book.

I believe others belonging to the same party follow—young men and maidens, good-looking and well-dressed.

But for them I have neither eyes nor ears. I have, indeed, almost forgotten the object of my

being there at all; and I am rather astonished when, during a lull in the arrivals, someone has leisure to inquire what I want, and the host himself condescends to give me an audience.

"Let you have a close carriage to Maple Hill? No, sir; indeed I couldn't to-night—not if you offered me any money. My cabs have all got their work cut out for them, bringing and taking away. I wish I'd a dozen more!"

"But what am I to do? I can't walk." "My advice would be, sir, if you'll excuse me, to take a bed here to-night and go on to-morrow morning. It's a nasty night for a journey."

"Quite impossible," I reply decidedly. "Not to be thought of for a moment. I suppose there is some kind of open conveyance you can let me have? That will be better than nothing."

"Well, sir," musingly, "there's the waggonette that's gone to the barracks for the officers—nobody else will want that to-night. You might have it in an hour or so, sir, when the horse has had a rest and a feed."

"All right; if you can do nothing better for me. Now I want a private sitting-room for a lady, with a good fire. And send up some tea as soon as we come in."

So I make my way back to the station, and find my poor Ariadne walking up and down the platform, as fast and far as the circumscribed shelter will permit; gust of wind and sudden drifts of rain meeting her every time she turns.

"I have done the best I can, though I am afraid you will think that best very bad," I say, going up to her, with immense pity for the slender flexible figure, looking so utterly unfit to contend with such a night. "There's nothing but a waggonette to be had in this wilderness; but with rugs and umbrellas we may make it do."

"You are very, very kind," she answers—pride, gratitude, and embarrassment contending in her most expressive voice.

"But for your kindness I don't know what I should have done. I never gave a thought to the ball when I started this morning."

"Well, had as things are, they might have been worse. Now you must come to the 'George' and have a rest, for the horse will not be ready yet."

"Oh, no, no! I cannot. It is impossible," she exclaims, shrinking back. "I had so very much rather wait here."

"But you really have 'no alternative' again," I answer smiling. "There is not even a waiting-room by way of shelter. Ours was the last train, and the porter is preparing to lock up the booking office."

We are standing just below the solitary lamp, and even through her veil I can see her colour come and go, and meeting the questioning glances of two dark, thoughtful eyes.

"Che said, said," I observe, preparing to lead the way. "You have absolutely no choice. Here, porter, when you have locked up bring my luggage to the George. You have none, I think?"

"None at all." "My unknown companion yields to the inevitable with a good grace.

She walks lightly along the dim, muddy streets and narrow, uneven pavements, with the firm, free step of one accustomed to exercise.

She talks with the ease and simplicity of one accustomed to society. And by the time I stand once more at the entrance to the George we have discussed Forham, its neighbourhood and its natives, almost like old friends.

Only when I attempt to direct the conversation to Maple Hill and its inhabitants she either relapses into cold reserve or changes the subject.

While I am looking for someone to show us to the sitting-room I bespoke wheels are again heard outside, and a young man runs up the steps and into the hall.

"Hallo, Johnson!" he calls, cheerily, to the approaching landlord, "have you got many people here? Has the Castle party come yet?"

Surely I know that voice! Of course! How absurd of me to have doubted even for a moment.

"Why, Heron!" I exclaim, as the hat and overcoat are hastily flung off, and the handsome

face and figure fully revealed, "I thought I knew your voice. Heron—"

But my companion turns white as snow, and shrinks into the shade of an unlighted recess, putting one trembling hand on my arm to draw me back beside her.

"Pray! pray! do not speak to him now!" she falters. "I know how very strange this must seem. But I implore you—"

I hesitate, startled and perplexed by her extreme agitation.

My friend, deeply engrossed in consigning his wraps to the landlord and carefully drawing on his gloves, has not heard my stammering and interrupting greeting, and the next moment has vanished in the direction of the ball-room, and the trembling girl and I are being ushered to a sitting-room on the first floor.

As the door is closed behind us, "I cautioned you," she says, with a faint attempt to smile, "against taking compassion on a stranger. You see what perplexities it brings upon you—what awkward positions you may be hurried into!"

"I repeat that I will run all risks. Now take off that cloak and hat—they are saturated with damp—and sit down here. This arm-chair looks a shade less uncomfortable than hotel chairs in general!"

She looks round anxiously, doubtfully, as though unseen foes might be lurking in dim corners. Then asks, with a vain endeavour to steady her voice,—

"Does Mr. Heron know that you are here?"

"Certainly not—how should he? I did think of sending to let him know; but, of course, if you dislike my doing so I will not!"

"You are most kind—and you must think my conduct very strange. But if it is not asking too great a sacrifice—"

"Not at all," I answer, laughing. "I shall have quite enough of his society in the month I am to spend at Maple Hill!"

"Oh! you are going to stay there—actually at the house?" she asks, with an odd anxiety in her voice.

"Yes, Heron is an old chum of mine. In fact, we were at Rugby together. This season he knocked up against me in town, and offered me some shooting. I was uncommonly glad to see him again, for I always liked him immensely, and I don't know how we came to lose sight of each other for such a long time."

I purposely linger over these remarks, but she makes no reply, and her face is averted.

All that I can see is the restless movement of her hand against the hard, black shiny surface of the horse-hair covered couch on which she sits. She has drawn off her gloves, and I notice that it is a very pretty hand, slender and white.

There is a peculiar old-fashioned ring on one finger—too large a ring for that little hand—with a crest deeply cut in its dark blue stone.

Standing close by the head of the couch I glance keenly down at the ring. Yes, I was sure of it, it is Heron's crest; his own long-billed, long-legged namesake.

Taken in conjunction with her emotion at seeing him—suspicious!

"Why will you not take off these wet things?" I repeat, presently. "There will soon be no time to do so."

Then she rises and obediently lays aside her ulster and hat, which are indeed dripping with rain,—and gives a sigh of mingled weariness and relief as she sinks into the chair that I have wheeled up to the fireplace.

She is young—apparently little more than twenty—and a lady, though travelling alone at so late an hour. Her dress is studiously plain; a dark, simply made silk, a long cloak of some soft heavy material, a small black hat and thick veil. She is neither tall nor short; too slender for perfect symmetry, too pale for youthful freshness; her light brown hair is twisted into a large knot at the back of her head. Her fine, clearly marked eyebrows are slightly contracted, giving a somewhat stern expression to her face. Her large, dark, speaking eyes alone can be called really beautiful; yet, taken altogether, hers is a face more interesting than many that are faultless in feature.

She seems too much preoccupied by real anxiety

to feel the singularity of our position—two total strangers, ignorant even of each other's names, sitting by an hotel fire, and looking forward to a midnight drive!

For my own part I am young enough, and accustomed to a sufficiently monotonous life, to find the situation interesting. No doubt I should have felt it still more so but that my thoughts will keep straying and that passing vision of,—

"All beauty that is throned in womanhood."

How shabby it was of Heron not to tell me of this ball! He might have brought me with him.

The clattering entrance of a tea-tray, with all the old-fashioned accompaniments, even to the "hissing urn," breaks up my reverie, and the stranger comes forward to make tea, with a sitting blush and a smile which wonderfully light up her quiet face.

Through the open door came the strains of the "Ochi Turchini" waltzes, and the tread of many feet keeping time to time.

"It is odd to think what a different scene there is so close to us! Would not you like to be taking part in it?" I ask, as the tantalising sounds grow more distinct.

"Not here—not in England," says the young lady, quietly. "I certainly don't know many English people; but I fancy their genius is not for society."

"But surely you are English!" I ask in amazement—so pure is her accent, so free from any trace of foreign *tint* her entire manner.

"My father was. But I lived abroad till his death, and society seemed to me on a pleasant footing there."

At this point our conversation is cut short by the announcement that the waggonette is ready.

"I have been thinking," says my companion, hesitatingly, when she is arrayed for the drive, "that since you are an old friend of Mr. Heron's it will surely be better for you to let him know that you are here, and return with him in the brougham!"

"And allow you to drive to Maple Hill alone, at this time of night, through this detestable weather! What can you think of me!"

"I must have done so had you not been here—if I got there in any way," she answers, with a sigh.

"But I am here, and if you please we will carry out the programme," I tell her. And we go down together to the hall.

Fortunately the rain had ceased, but it is a wild, cold, gloomy night. The wind has risen and drives heavy masses of cloud across the moon. The horse is restless, and a little delay occurs whilst the ostler goes to his head, and I try to shelter my companion from the stormy wind.

Whilst waiting we both involuntarily raise our eyes to the long, lighted windows of the Assembly Room, just above. As we do so the centre one, leading to a covered balcony filled with plants, is thrown open, and a lady steps out. I knew her in a moment; "There is none like her, none." The brilliant light of the ball-room streams out, and irradiates her beautiful head, as she stands motionless amongst the flowers.

"This is cruel," says a man's voice, behind her; and my friend Heron's handsome face appears above her shoulder. "This is most unjust. Here have I come from Maple Hill through this thrice execrable weather, solely for this one waltz, which you promised to keep for me a fortnight ago!"

"There must be some extraordinary blunder," says another voice—the voice of the young man who was with her in the hall. "I assure you, Heron, Miss Corbet is engaged to me."

"Miss Corbet, is this true? Or am I under the painful necessity of wronging my best friend for slandering you?"

"You are under no necessity at all," replies the girl, scornfully, "but that of dancing with some one else. I believe I did promise this waltz to each of you—and so I will dance it with neither."

And as she turns away—proud, wilful, radiant—to the light and music of the crowded room, the ostler lets the horse's head go, and we drive away into the gloomy night.

The girl opposite to me leans back in the furthest corner of the carriage, as though shrinking out of sight and hearing of the group in the balcony.

CHAPTER II.

For a long time—if seems for hours—we drive along a dark, heavy, lonely road, in absolute silence.

I venture to ask if she is cold, and she answers, "Oh no, not at all," in a tone which assures me that she really does not know or care whether she is cold or not. After this there is no more to be said. Till our driver suddenly checks his horse, and jumping down, begins carefully to lead him up a steep ascent.

Then my companion rouses herself, sits upright, and says,—

"This is Maple Hill, from which both the village and the house you are going to visit take their names. You need not drive me further than the top of the hill. I shall then be very near my home."

Such an expressive, little pause she makes before uttering that last word!

"But," I answer, eagerly, "surely you will allow me to put you down at your own door! The roads are frightful; and really, you know, you ought not to be walking alone on such a night as this. What will your people say!"

"My people," she replies, with the same tone of half-ironical sadness, "will not concern themselves in the least about my being alone. If I were not alone they might indeed object."

"But," I persist, "they need not see me, you know. And if you wish it to be an Arabian Nights sort of affair—multi, you know—you can tie a handkerchief over my eyes and tell me to drive fifty paces before I take it off, or something of that sort; and then of course, I should never know the house again. Please look so different by daylight—especially when one has never seen them at all."

"Thank you, but indeed that would not do. It must be as I said. No doubt you think I act strangely, but I am strangely situated; and I have something still more strange to ask you. If by any chance we should meet during your visit to Maple Hill—"

"If by any chance!" I repeat interrupting her in uncontrollable astonishment—"why, it is not a chance at all—it is a certainty. In a village like this we must meet. Often, I hope."

"Few things are more improbable," she replies. "But what I want to say is that if we should meet—it must be as utter strangers."

At first my surprise completely silences me. I have really felt an interest in this girl, and tried to show it to the best of my ability. I have looked forward to an acquaintance with her which after such an odd beginning could not become so formal and conventional as usual, and I cannot think I have deserved this curt dismissal.

"Certainly, if you desire it," I answer, coldly, after a moment's pause. "But I confess you give me a hard task."

"Pray do not think I am ungrateful!" she exclaims, answering my aggrieved tone.

"There is nothing in the world to be grateful for," I reply, sublimely. "I could have done no less for anyone under the same circumstances. I only felt surprised that after being thrown together in a way which might naturally have made us a little more than acquaintances you should insist on our becoming so much less."

"It is not my fault," she says, distressed. "I quite appreciate your kindness. I shall remember it gratefully all my life, but you must forget me!"

"That will not be easy."

"Well, you must behave as if you had forgotten me—or rather, as if you had never seen me—if we do chance to meet again, or you may do harm that can never be undone. No. I must have no friends. Now we are at the top of the

hill. Make your driver stop here for two or three minutes. Thank you! thank you for all your kindness. Now, good-night—and good-bye!"

While speaking she opens the door of the waggonette and rises to her feet. Then she springs lightly out and vanishes—swallowed up by night and darkness.

Five minutes later I am driven through the lodge gates of Maple Hill House. I can only dimly make out a large, straggling building, surrounded by large, straggling grounds.

Plenty of large dogs, and small ones, too, give a noisy greeting to the wheels of my chariot, and then there is a dash and hurry of lights and servants, and I am ushered into a large, rather gloomy apartment, at one end of which a fire glows silently.

On either side of the fireplace stands a small table, bearing a shaded lamp. An elderly lady sits working by one table, an elderly gentleman sits reading by the other.

Nothing can exceed the sober and respectable dulness of this interior which I invade at such an unprecedented hour almost like a firebrand or a bombshell. I do not seem to be so unwelcome, however.

The elderly gentleman throws down his Quarterly when I am announced, and advances to greet me.

"Well, my dear sir, I am glad to see you at last. We have been looking forward to that pleasure for a long time. But we have managed badly amongst us, eh? What a day for a journey! And how did you get here? We would have sent a carriage to meet you if we had known you were coming to-day!"

"I had been obliged to put off my visit so often that I thought you would all be tired of my continual vacillations, and determined to start at the first opportunity, without waiting to write. Of course, I hit on a bad day—one always does."

"Shocking—shocking! and no conveyance to be had but a waggonette! How was that!"

"Someone is giving a ball at the 'George,' and all the cabs were engaged."

"Ah! to be sure. Philip has gone there. You ought to have come down a day or two earlier and gone with him, if we had only known—that is, if you care to turn out for a long drive on such a night for the sake of half-a-dozen dances. But I dare say you do; I dare say you do. There's no accounting for tastes!"

During the conversation that ensued I observe my host and hostess with some curiosity.

"We are so happy to see you under our roof, at last, Mr. Poyntz," says Mrs. Heron, in her mild persuasive tones. "We have so often wished to thank you for all your kindness to dear Philip at a time when circumstances compelled us to seem to neglect him so much."

"Yes," says her husband heartily. "He was lucky in having a friend like you—very lucky indeed. We are quite sensible of it, my dear sir."

They insist on my making a substantial meal, and on sending me off to bed, Mrs. Heron adding,—

"We breakfast at nine, Mr. Poyntz. But there is no law against fresh coffee being made at any hour."

I take such full advantage of my hostess's gentle hint about the possibility of getting fresh coffee at any time that suits me that the family breakfast hour has long passed, and Mr. Heron has ridden off to a distant part of his property, when I at last make my appearance.

In fact, whilst I am still in the midst of my apologies to Mrs. Heron the door opens, and culprit number two enters—bright and good-looking as ever, serene as though he were the soul of punctuality, fresh as though he had gone to bed with the domestic fowls.

The start he gives on catching sight of me is quite dramatic.

"Poyntz!" he cries, "for I suppose it is Poyntz—though you hadn't grown a hair of that black moustache last time I saw you—when an

how, in the name of all that is intelligible, did you get here?"

"I arrived last night, I may say, by water," I answer laughing. "I did the last stage in the 'George' waggonette."

"The 'George'! By Jove! Why I was there, at a dance—old fellow, if I had but seen you."

I am sorely tempted to say that I did see him, but I don't quite know how I could account for not having sent a message to him.

I fear that if I once begin disclosures they may lead me further than I intend, so loyalty to my fair unknown keeps me out of danger.

"Well, I'm awfully glad you are here at last, old man. You don't look altogether withered and dried up by London smoke. He's not such a bad specimen of a cockney quill-driver on the whole, is he, mother?"

"You are very rude, Philip; but I suppose Mr. Poynts is used to you. Did you enjoy your evening? Was it a good ball?"

"Pretty fair, for a country hop."

"And who was the belle?"

"Miss Corbet, of course."

"How did she look? what did she wear?"

"She looked as she always looks. How in the world can I tell what she wore, my dear mother? You women always fancy we are as well up in millinery jargon as yourselves."

The words would sound harsh on any other lips, but something in Philip's voice and smile makes, and always has made, commonplaces seem lively and impertinences pleasant.

"We are getting the place into something like order now, but there's a great deal to be done yet," observes Philip, when, breakfast over, we have explored gardens, vicineries, green-houses, forcing-houses, stables—and all at last pausing to admire a group of noble beeches in the park, when a third person appears on the scene.

"Hulloa, young men!" shouts the hearty voice of Mr. Heron, who has ridden up to us across the turf, unheard and unseen in our close conversation. "How is it you are not pitching into the partridges? Not in good form for powder after the ball, &c., Philip? Good heavens! I don't know what young men are made of nowadays. When I was young we thought nothing of riding twenty miles to a ball (no railroads then, my boy), dancing all night, and turning up at the cover side at ten sharp next morning!"

"Fact is, sir, you used up all the muscular energy so extravagantly in your time that none was left for us. We will show you what execution we can do to-morrow, as early as you please. After lunch, to-day, I want to make one or two calls, and Poynts is going with me."

I think the expression of Philip's ingenious countenance would have told me that one of these calls was likely to be a very special one, even without the private observations which I had the opportunity of making last night. And I feel an extraordinary amount of virtuous indignation on behalf of the fair unknown when I notice my friend's restlessness and absence of mind during lunch, his careful toilet, and his alternate pre-occupation and excitement during our ride from Maple Hill to Ferny Grove.

"I am going to introduce you to the belle of the ball, Gerard," he says, rousing himself from a fit of abstraction, as a handsome white house comes in view, backed by a semi-circle of Scotch firs; "that's Sir John Grove's place, and Miss Corbet is his ward. Now you will see what you missed by not being with me last night."

Lady Grove is at home, we find, on reaching the house, and in her I have no difficulty in recognising the wearer of the emerald velvet last night. But she is peacefully stitching away at something incomprehensible in crewels, quite alone—and a hot flush mounts to Heron's pleasant face when he becomes aware of the fact.

"How good-natured of you to come and enliven my solitude," says the much-mistaken woman, as he seats himself facing her, smothering his disappointment as best he can.

"I have been left to myself the whole day.

Sir John and the men were off long before I came down, and the girls drove over to Bagley Wood with their luncheon, and I have seen nothing of any of them since."

For the next ten minutes we do our best to amuse Lady Grove—not at all a difficult task—and then manage to get just as far as the huge stone portico on our homeward way, when we see the whole party of absentees coming up the steps.

Miss Corbet is first. In her plain, closely-fitting brown velvet dress and small hat, without any ornament but the brilliance of her eyes and the delicate bloom of her cheeks, I think she looks even handsomer than in all last night's radiance. But probably I should think the same of any attire in which she chose to array herself. I wonder what she would think if she knew that a flower from her hair is reposing (in a somewhat faded and flattened condition) not very far from my heart!

She is attended by Captain Grove, of the straw-coloured moustache; and also by a middle-aged, close-shaved, and closely-cropped man, with a plain, high-cheek boned, hard-featured face, but a good walk and figure, and scrupulously simple dress, whom I hear them call Lord Caradoc.

Philip pauses this group with a slight bow and a quickly averted glance, and would do the same to the noisier and far more numerous party who follow, but they have no idea of letting him escape so easily. On the contrary, they surround him with hearty greetings and merry questions, and I see that handsome Philip is as great a favourite here as he was everywhere in the days of our boyhood.

"You must turn back with us. Oh! nonsense, indeed, you must!" cries Nellie Grove, a pretty brunette of eighteen.

And so after a little further persuasion Mr. Heron returns in the company of Miss Nellie, while I slowly follow, at leisure, to observe her who fills all my thoughts.

The spell is upon me at last, to which hitherto I have fancied myself insensible. I am half inclined to say, with the Lady of Shalott, "the curse is come upon me!" For what hopeless, mad infatuation must be any fancy of mine for such a woman as Honora Corbet!

However, this tragic mood does not last.

It only sends a sharp sense of my own folly across my mind, and then every other feeling is absorbed in the pleasure of watching her.

At last those wonderful, changeful, lustrous eyes meet mine, with an expression of curiosity—nay, of interest. They say so plainly, "Come and speak to me," that I obey the summons as though it had been put into words, and appropriate the vacant chair by her side.

"I cannot help thinking we have met before," she says, in those low tones which without the appearance of whispering she can manage to make inaudible to all save one happy hearer. "Have I not seen you in town?"

"Most certainly not! I do not remember ever meeting you in London." (I cannot say I never saw her before!) "And if I had done so it would have been impossible that I should forget."

"How strange! Then, perhaps—" with a thoughtful pause—"is Mrs. Neville Beauchamp a great friend of yours?"

"She is my cousin!"

"And she has a photograph of you in her album?"

"I believe she has half-a-dozen."

"Ah, then it must be your portrait that I have seen."

There is a subtle battery in the thought that this brilliant creature during all the triumphs of her London season must have seen my portrait, noticed it, remembered it and recognised me by it, or how could I have become at all associated with Laura Beauchamp in her mind?

The secret complacency with which I dwell on this idea is rudely disturbed by Philip, who comes up to tell me that we shall inevitably be late for dinner and set down in the blackest of black books by his father unless we mount instantaneously.

Then he, too, lingers for a parting word with the enchantress.

"Faithless!" he says, in an energetic whisper.

"How so?" asks Honora, lifting her lovely eyes, all innocent candour, to his face.

"Did you not promise that if I rode over after lunch to-day I should find you at home? Do you never, even by accident, keep a promise?"

"Did I promise to stay at home? That was very rash. But then, you know, it did not seem likely to be at all nice weather for walking. Now as it turned out it was quite too lovely to stay indoors."

"Besides," says Philip, with what he intends for withering sarcasm, "besides, you were, of course, obliged to pioneer Lord Caradoc."

CHAPTER III.

A FORTNIGHT or so of the easy intimacy and constant running up against each other of country life makes me as much at home with the Herons and their neighbours as though I had been "to the manner born." They all seem to be very well off, very sociable, very much given to entertaining and being entertained.

Philip's popularity is an intense delight to his father. He talks of it to me sometimes with full reliance on my sympathy.

"You see he has quite taken his place," Mr. Heron says, with after-dinner expansion. "He is the finest young man in the county, sir, and I don't think many people will contradict me. Now I have only one wish left—to see him in Parliament. But first of all he must marry, sir—and he must marry well. It's an enormous satisfaction to me," he adds, filling up his glass and sending the decanter my way, "that the boy has never been drawn into the slightest entanglement, though he is such a good-looking fellow, and so run after wherever he goes."

Oh, indeed! Then how about that blue ring, and the poor girl's overwhelming agitation at seeing Master Philip?

"Not a single scrape, sir, has my boy ever got into, and the mad way some young fellows ruin their future prospects for the sake of a pretty face! Now, even when our affairs looked so unpromising that he might well have been desperate and thought they could not be worse, he kept square, and when he was so long abroad he came back as free as he went. No more woe! Then suppose we look for Mrs. Heron."

"When he was abroad so long," And my fellow-traveller told me that she had lived abroad "till quite lately." Was I getting hold of a clue to the mystery? How I wished she had not bound me so strictly to secrecy as to our meeting, so that I could have questioned Philip frankly, and brought him to book.

I determine to get what I can out of Philip, so I question him rather closely about the girls of the neighbourhood.

"And so you have not many pretty girls in these regions, Phil?" I ask, meditatively, after a brief pause.

"I think we are fairly well off—all that there is you have seen, as I have already had the honour of telling you."

"All—without any exception? Are you sure there is no one lying perdu, born to blush unseen by any eyes but yours?" I persist.

Either Philip really looks uneasy and suspicious or my secret consciousness makes me think he does.

"Why in the world do you ask?" he inquires, with rather a forced laugh.

"Well, your father was talking to me about your matrimonial prospects the other day, and I wondered what limits there might be to your range of choice."

"I suppose they are not geographical. But what did the governor say about it?"

"He said what governors usually do say. That it is incumbent on you to find him a daughter-in-law with good looks, fortune and position. You are not to marry her without love, but you are not to love her without these requisites."

"Don't thee marry for money, but goa wheer money is," quotes Philip, laughing.

"Exactly. I quite understand. Well, if one were bound only to look in this neighbourhood for such a paragon I suppose there can be little doubt of where she would be found," he adds, with the nearest approach he has yet made to putting confidence in me.

"You are thinking of Miss——?"

"Speak of the sun and his rays shine," says Philip. "Look below."

We were riding, and had reached the steepest part of Maple Hill—the part up which my unknown companion and I were led so carefully on the night of my arrival—where it becomes, in fact, a cliff, with a sheer fall of some depth on the right hand. Through the valley thus formed runs a broad, but shallow stream, across which is thrown a plank bridge with a rough hand-rail.

On the bridge stands Miss Corbet and Lord Caradoc.

She, graceful, elegant and tranquil as ever, turns a little aside, and looks intently in the rippling brook.

He leans one arm on the hand-rail, and, slightly bending, gazes only on her.

They do not hear the quiet fall of our horses' hoofs on the turf edge of the cliff, but their voices rise to us in the surrounding stillness.

"And you really think a rough, battered fellow like me, no longer young, and never particularly attractive when I was young, might still have a chance with a beautiful girl? For myself, I mean—I know there are heaps of girls everywhere, who would jump at the title and so on; but I am fool enough to wish to be liked for my own sake. That, partly, is what has kept me single so long!"

"I think," answers Honora, slowly and emphatically, "that any woman whom you could care for, and who knew you well, would be sure to like you for your own sake. Girls do not particularly admire boys, Lord Caradoc. It is much more gratifying to them to be the choice of a man of mature mind!"

"You really advise me to try my fate? Take care, Miss Corbet! I have no fancy for being refused, and I shall owe you a grudge if you mislead me!"

"I am willing to run the risk!" she replied, lifting her eyes to him with one of those appealing glances—those soft, lingering smiles—whose magic has so often been tried on both Heron and myself.

"Oh, by Jove!" says the former, between his teeth, "we have had quite enough of this sort of thing," and regardless of the astonished resistance of his horse, accustomed to more consideration, he urges him up the very worst bit of the road with something approaching to ferocity.

Does Honora Corbet really mean to marry Lord Caradoc, in whose unflattering estimate of himself I entirely concur, or is she only "fooling him to the top of his bent?" Has he or I, or Philip, been the dupe?

We are all at her feet—that is certain.

Is it merely from love of power that she keeps us there, or is her own mind wavering and uncertain between the material blessings of Caradoc Castle and its rent-roll, and one superior personal advantage?

I laugh to myself rather bitterly, as I ponder over these things in the solitude of my own apartment, too wakeful for bed, too lazy and preoccupied for a book.

Philip has gone off to his room rather earlier than usual, his humour perceptibly not improved by the encounter of the afternoon. And I have followed his example; but when once there do not in the least know what to do with myself.

I cannot entirely break myself into the early hours customary when there is no form of entertainment going on.

Some old sage remarks that "There is nothing like a spice of danger to stimulate enterprise."

Whilst dressing for dinner I noticed that a careless gardener had left his ladder leaning against the wall, just below my dressing-room window.

If it has not been removed three minutes will

place me at liberty to enjoy a smoke and a stroll unknown to, unsuspected by, dog or man.

No sooner thought than done.

The door of my room is locked, the dressing-room window gently raised, my feet touch the topmost rung of the ladder, and a few seconds later they are planted on the turf.

Suddenly I hear footsteps on the gravel walk, a few yards from me—light, rapid, and regular.

Two figures emerge from the shade of the nearest cedar into the broad light of the moon, and as they do so I step back into the deep shadow formed by a sharp angle of the building.

The new comers are a young man and woman; so much I can see already.

Domestic love-making, no doubt. I would not on any account interrupt their stolen bliss—nor, to tell the truth, do I want my schoolboy escapade to furnish amusement for the servants' hall. I will lie hidden till they pass.

Hang it all, they don't pass.

They stand still, exactly in front of my hiding-place—so near that I could almost put out my hand and touch them.

And then I recognise in the romantic promenaders no maid-servant and man-servant bidding defiance to the higher powers—but Philip and the fair unknown.

Perhaps it is the effect of the moonlight, which certainly is a beautifier of all it touches; but she does look very fair, as she is thus unconsciously brought under my critical gaze.

Her face is pale and pensive as ever, but it has not the worn look of fright and fatigue it bore when I first saw it.

Her eyes are liquid and lovely. Her figure is full of grace.

I admire, in spite of myself, but I cannot describe—I cannot even comprehend—the sense of bitter mortification with which I make this unexpected discovery.

Philip, it would appear, is always and everywhere preferred to me.

"I am sorry to be so persistent," the girl is saying, in those expressive tones which sounded so sweet when they were addressed to me. "I am sorry to be so importunate; but if you only knew how all this shame, and mystery and concealment is breaking my heart! The time seems endless while we are in such a false position. I know I gave my consent at first; what choice had I! but I did not realize half the consequences it would entail. Now I had rather beg my bread than go on like this, if it were for myself alone. If we were only able to go away! Not a word should be said—I would make any promise, give any pledge of secrecy and concealment you chose to dictate, if only we could go away!"

"You embarrass me awfully," he replies, in a tone which is half sympathetic, half impatient. "I can't say how sorry I am for all this, but really, you know, I do do nothing. My father is dead against it, you see!"

"Your father does not understand—does not believe the truth," she replies, hastily withdrawing her hand and standing before him erect, with flashing eyes like a little goddess of pride and scorn.

"If he did," comments Philip, pushing up his bright wavy hair with the perplexed gesture I knew so well. "If he did, I'm afraid it would not mend matters much for you."

"Oh!" cries the girl, wringing her hands, "how cruelly, cruelly unjust!"

I don't want to learn their secrets—at least, I don't want to go on overhearing them in this disgusting way, and perhaps find out something which may compel me to quarrel with Philip, or leave Maple Hill, or do something hasty and unpleasant.

Yet what can I do? Already I have heard too much to make it possible to show myself.

L'inconnue moved a step nearer to my hiding-place as she leaves Philip's side, and I notice, to my redoubled amazement, that she wears some indoor dress of black gauzy material, and has over it nothing but a lace shawl—no hat, bonnet, or gloves; we must be very near neighbours, after all.

Clack goes my pasteboard against the stone coping of the wall. I had entirely forgotten that

I was holding it in my hand, about to light a cigar, when first I heard their footsteps.

It is fortunate I had not lighted it, or the scent would infallibly have betrayed me!

They looked round startled and anxious.

"I must go," says the girl, in a tone of bitter sadness. "I had far better not have come. What good has it done!"

"Stay a moment, I will walk with you. Do try to understand that I am not to blame. You know how I am situated; you know this state of things has not been brought about by me. If I am ever more independent—if it is ever in my power, I promise you——"

"I decline to look forward to your wearing dead men's shoes, if that is what you mean," she interrupts him, coldly, "and by that time there would certainly be one victim of this cruel concealment beyond the reach of reparation."

I cannot hear his answer, they have moved too far away. I wait till the last faint reverberation of their footsteps dies in the distance, and then regain my room by the same ignominious mode by which I left it—a "sadder" (that is to say, a more profoundly puzzled and dissatisfied) if not a "wiser" man.

CHAPTER IV.

"THEY misunderstand me," says Miss Corbet. "People almost always do misunderstand me. But," raising her radiant eyes to mine with a look half reproachful, half tender, "I fancied, somehow, that you would not."

She is seated in the verandah which runs along one side of the drawing-room at the Grove—a verandah roofed and wreathed with all sorts of graceful climbing plants, lined with every kind of scented exotic, and dimly lit by two or three Chinese lanterns. And I am leaning against the trellis-work, looking down on her.

We have been dining at the Grove—Philip and I—and now that night feasting is nearly over, and I am snatching one blissful half-hour, payment in full for the tedious formality of all the rest.

We are alone.

"I do not know how it is," says Miss Corbet, pursuing her confidence, "but everyone will tell you I am heartless, and care for nothing but admiration. It is not my fault if people will admire me. I really cannot help it, can I?"

"No," I reply in all sincerity. "Nor they either."

"Ah! now you are laughing at me, and I am quite serious. What am I to do? It is hard—hard—because I do not actually make myself unpleasant to people, that I should be perpetually accused of flirting, and then you see there is no one to take my part. I am very much alone in the world," she goes on, clasping her slender hands with a sort of "petitionary grace," and speaking in a soft and pleading tone. "You know I have none of those family ties that most girls have. I cannot even remember my father or mother, and I was their only child. The Groves have brought me up, and Nellie is very kind and good, of course, but she is not like a sister—not——"

"Not sympathetic!"

"Exactly. And my guardian and his wife often distress me. I know they mean it all for the best—dear, good people; but they are always planning for me, and insisting on my showing special civility to some eligible party."

"Lord Caradoc, for instance. By-the-by, that potentate does not show to-night. What has become of him?"

"Oh! don't you know?" with a lovely crimson flush—"don't you know he has returned to his mountains!"

"Do you mean to the society of his maiden aunt, at the Hall?"

"No—not! To that great, dreary place in Wales, from which he takes his title."

"Indeed! A very sudden flight, was it not?"

"Well," looking down, and playing with

her fan, with an air of the prettiest possible hesitation, "of course there were reasons."

"Miss Corbet—Honora—can it be that he has gone back a disappointed man?"

"Is it quite fair to ask me? But how can you ask me! So worldly as everyone says I am!" she adds, with a laugh that is not at all mirthful.

"People are abominably unjust!" I indignantly exclaim.

"I will not deny," she presently continues, with much candour, "that perhaps, at one time, for just a little while, I may have been dazzled—tempted. Most girls would have been. It is a great position; but—but lately I have learnt that there are better things in life than rank and wealth."

Her look, her tone, something in her manner which no words can convey, dazzle and intoxicate me.

"Honora!" I exclaim, eagerly, bending over her till my lips touch her shining hair, "take care what you are saying. You make me think—you make me hope—you don't know what mad visions are rising in my brain."

"Tell them to me," she whispers softly.

"You deny that you are worldly—you say that you have given up ambition—that you are lonely—that you long for sympathy. If you meant all this—if by telling me you meant all that I dare to dream—if a life's entire devotion, a heart's worship can content you, take mine, and make me happy."

"This is indeed madness," she whispers, but her voice trembles, and her hand is not withdrawn. "You scarcely know me. A few weeks ago we were utter strangers."

"Utter strangers!" I wish she had not used those words! Across the atmosphere of glamour into which she has now plunged me comes the recollection of the last time I heard them, as a breath of the pure air of heaven may blow across the scented closeness of a crowded ball-room.

But this is no time for such memories.

"Love is like death," I answer her, hurriedly. "It knows no limit of time."

"This must be a dream!" she murmurs.

"It rests with you to make it a reality."

There is talk and movement in the drawing-room. Some one approaches the verandah.

Miss Corbet rises—not abruptly, but with the harmonious composure which characterises all she does.

"One instant!" I implore, in an eager whisper. "You have not given me my answer. May I ask for it to-morrow?"

"Oh! not to-morrow—that is too soon. You must let me think over what seems so strange and sudden, and then there will be so much opposition."

"The sooner we face it the better. At all events you allow me to hope!"

"I cannot prevent it—can I! Well, to-morrow, you know, we all ride to the High Springs. Two days after that, perhaps, if you do not change your mind."

The tenderness of her look makes up for the playfulness of her tone, and I feel certain that the depths of her nature have been stirred at last, and that if this is a dream it is one from which neither of us will ever wish to wake.

Half-an-hour later Philip is driving me back to Maple Hill. Through all my triumphant excitement I feel some twinges of remorse, as I glance at his face, which looks pale and haggard in the moonlight.

For a wonder he has not appeared to notice my monopoly of Honora Corbet. In fact, it seems to have been only by a strong effort that he has noticed anything around him. Some subject confined to his own breast has engrossed all his thoughts.

Unless I am much deceived, I can partly guess what that engrossing topic must be, and after what I heard and saw last night why should I feel any self-reproach for having won Honora?

When I wake next morning my mind is a chaos of mingled rapture and consternation.

I hardly know whether I really am an "engaged" man or no, and what is yet worse, I hardly know whether I wish to be!

What present means have I for making a fit home for such a peerless bride!

My modest competence would seem the barest provision for one accustomed like Honora to town gaiety and country comfort. Her dainty elegance would look even ludicrously out of place in such a setting as I could give my jewel.

Philip does not join us at breakfast, and as soon as the meal is over Mrs. Heron invites me to accompany her on a tour of inspection through the hot-houses. This is a somewhat unusual honour, and I am rather at a loss as to how I have deserved it.

When at last we enter a pinery where there is no gardener at work my hostess hurriedly explains herself.

"I asked you to come with me this morning, Mr. Poyntz," she says, "in order that I might consult you about Philip. I know you will make allowance for a mother's anxiety. He does not confide in me, but, of course, no one can help being aware that he is deeply attached to Honora Corbet."

"Do you think so?"

"Why, you must have observed it. No one can fail to do so. Do not be afraid of betraying his confidence."

"He has placed none in me."

"Is it possible? I thought young men always told each other such things! But what I wanted to ask you was whether anything had gone wrong between them—whether there was any little quarrel or estrangement—because you must have noticed that my poor boy has not been at all like himself lately."

"I have certainly thought his spirits rather variable for the last few days."

"He is not at all the same creature, and you cannot even guess the cause!"

"I assure you, my dear Mrs. Heron, he has told me nothing."

"I hope—I hope it is not Honora's fault," she sighs. "She is a most lovely and charming girl, but people do say she is both ambitious and fickle, and if she has been playing with Philip I know how he would suffer, and he ought to be happy—he deserves to be happy!"

On this point I have my own opinion, but it is one which, I need hardly say, I keep strictly to myself. No more is said on the subject, and poor Mrs. Heron returns to the house having profited little by our conversation.

CHAPTER V.

THE riding party to the High Springs bids fair to be very pleasant. The morning is bright and sunny, though with a dash of autumnal freshness in the air. I have chosen a horse which the grooms say is rather fresh, and which they further aver is not blent with the sweetest temper in the world. But I have had Red Rover out before; I know he can go like the wind, and in my present state of mind, chafing, too, under the delay imposed upon me by Miss Corbet, I think it will do me no harm to have something to occupy me besides my own tumultuous thoughts.

Mr. Heron and Sir John Grove, deep in county prospects, are jogging on side by side.

Nellie and Philip, Captain Grove and a young brother officer also on furlough, a pleasant girl who is staying at the rectory, Honora and I agree to a race to the High Springs—a pretty cascade in the hills whence the brook already mentioned takes its rise.

The prize is to be a silver arrow, which fastens Honora's hat.

At first we keep together pretty well, but as the ground begins to rise rapidly, the superiority of the horses Honora and I are riding tells visibly.

One after another of our companions drops behind, and when the Springs—two threads of silver glistening in the sun, against a dark rocky background—at last come into view we alone are there to hail the sight.

Honora is doing her best to win, and perhaps I ought to allow her to do so. But I have set my heart on that silver arrow as a *gage d'amour*.

Red Rover has entered into the spirit of the

thing as keenly as his rider, and when only a few yards have to be covered he forges bravely forward, and I jump down beside the miniature cascade and making a cup of my hand drink Honora's health as she draws bridle by my side.

Laughing and blushing she admits herself beaten, and raises her hands to unfasten the trophy from her hat.

But as she does so she utters a cry of dismay—her little gold-handled whipslips from her loosened grasp, and rolling down the hill drops into a wide pool formed by the springs before they flow off into the brook, and artificially deepened to make a reservoir for dry weather.

Of course I follow the whip, and of course I dive for it. What less could a man do for his lady-love?

There is not the slightest danger, except of a thorough wetting, for I can swim.

But the water is chilly after the heat and excitement of our gallop, and I am shivering with most uncomfortable violence as I run up the hill and exchange the recovered treasure for the silver arrow.

Honora's thanks are earnest—even tender.

But the others are all riding up by this time, and amidst a chorus of mingled chaff, condolence, and congratulation on my exploit, I receive one piece of advice which seems sensible on the face of it—to ride home as fast as possible and change my dripping garments.

The luncheon party at the Grove must perforce be given up.

One parting word with Honora we manage between us to secure.

"May I come to you to-morrow for my answer?" I ask.

And she whispers, "Yes."

Red Rover has to do his utmost for the next half-hour or so, and I am rattling down hill at a pace which it is impossible to check on the instant.

Somehow or other I take a wrong turning, and find myself in a wild and lonely region, which I have never yet explored.

I thought I should be at Maple Hill by lunch time, but on looking at my watch I find it is already past the hour. And surely it has suddenly become very dark, for the time of day!

What is that noise—thunder!

Presently there is a rending flash of lightning, at which he chooses to shy violently. And as at the moment I am attending more to the storm than the horse, he pitches me over his head, and when I fall, my own strikes sharply against a heap of stones!

Is this myself—this helpless mass of aching inability!

I suppose it must be; but the heavy object lying half-consciously amongst a heap of pillows, too weak to move, to speak, to think, is difficult to identify.

I have puzzled over the problem several times before, I know, at long intervals; but hitherto it has always got the better of me, and whilst wrestling with it I have drifted away into a state of unconsciousness again.

Now I try to solve it by the sense of touch, and find that only one hand is available for the purpose.

The other lies by my side, swollen and benumbed, and the arm to which it belongs is imprisoned in splints and bandages.

It takes me so long to make this important series of discoveries that at the end of them I fall back, quite exhausted.

Next time I return to consciousness my brain is clearer; there is more light in the room; and on moving my head a little I see, sitting near the bed, and intent on some noiseless needlework, *l'inconnue* herself.

The return to consciousness after serious illness has one characteristic in common with dreams; nothing seems very surprising to the patient.

Accordingly I am not at all startled by this apparition, unexpected though it assuredly is, and lie watching the quiet figure, calmly and somewhat critically.

In the full morning light, composed and unconscious of observation, neither harassed nor

excited, as I have previously seen her, she is much more attractive-looking than I at first supposed.

"I am glad to see you looking so much better," she says, gently, folding and laying aside her work. "I hope you are no longer in such pain. Now you must have some—"

"I don't want anything at all!" I interrupt her, in an absurdly, unmanagably weak voice.

"I only want to talk to you; to ask—"

"We nurses never inquire what our patients think they want," she answers, with a smile. "We know all about it so much better than they do. Besides, unless you take everything I bring you I will neither listen to you nor answer your questions. And you will find that I can be very determined."

So there is nothing for it but submission. And when I have obediently swallowed all she gives me she resumes her seat and glances at her watch.

"Now you may talk to me—quietly—for exactly five minutes. By that time I hope your doctor will be here to say exactly how much exertion is to be permitted you."

"Five minutes! and I want to ask fifty questions! Where am I—what has happened—how long have I been ill—what good fortune threw me into your care?"

"Stop! stop!" she cries, holding up a warning hand. I knew the pretty hand, and I knew the peculiar ring upon it too! And at sight of them so many memories and conjectures rush back upon my still feeble brain that I am on the verge of losing all control over my own thoughts again.

The sound of her quiet voice helps to steady them, however.

"You are in your own room at Maple Hill," she says, "but I don't wonder that you did not recognise it at first; we have been obliged to move and take away so much of the furniture. You had a very serious accident; Red Rover threw you during a thunderstorm. I suppose you must have missed your way, for they looked for you in vain in every likely direction after the horse found his way back to the stables. And when you were found at last—many hours afterwards—you were insensible, wet through, and had injured your head and broken one arm."

"A tolerably good morning's work, upon my word! And how long ago was that? It seems to me about a year!"

"Rather more than three weeks."

"What a nuisance I must have been to everybody! I wonder when I shall be able to get back to town?"

"I fancy you must not even begin to think of it yet. And please don't attempt to move that arm. The quieter and more patient you are, and the more obedient to your doctor and nurse, the sooner you will be able to run away from us."

"I should think you will all be heartily glad to get rid of me. But it cannot have been only the shock of the fall which has kept me in this state so long!"

"No; you had concussion of the brain, followed by fever. And now you must not talk or be talked to any more, or very likely you will have a relapse."

"Only one more question. Philip—Mrs. Heron—"

"They will be very glad to hear how much better you are. Now, not another word till your doctor comes."

My doctor I find is young Hart, who is very clever and devoted to his profession, and has evidently much enjoyed the variety introduced into his humdrum country practice by my rather complicated "case."

My convalescence is slow and tedious, but I endure its fluctuations with a philosophy astonishing to myself, assisted by Hart's society and the ministrations of the gentlest, the most patient, the most companionable of nurses.

She reads to me when I am unable to read to myself (the fever has weakened my sight, but Hart says that with care it will soon be as strong as ever again)—talks freely and pleasantly when I am disposed to talk—or sits at work, within hearing if I should want anything from her,

in a silence which is almost equally companionable.

My new friend is both; and the fresh experience is so agreeable that I think it cheaply purchased, so far as I am myself concerned, by this illness.

Perhaps lingering physical weakness is mainly responsible for my cowardice (I am sure I hope it may be so), but it certainly is a fact that I am in no hurry to get strong—to leave my "loophole of retreat"—to enter again on the "race for wealth," and to face the question of exactly how I stand with Honora Corbet.

There is another point that puzzles me when I get too far on the road to recovery to take everything as a matter-of-course.

How does it happen that the fair unknown is always here—that her authority seems absolute—and that I never see anyone else?

No, by the way, she is not quite always here. She goes away before Dr. Hart comes for his long evening visits, and sometimes her place of watcher is taken by a good-natured but taciturn old woman who keeps my rooms in order, washes my hands and face as if I were a baby, and is called Mrs. Withers.

As soon as I am able to sit up in an armchair for an hour or so daily I resolve on getting to the bottom of some, at all events, of the small mysteries that trouble me.

"How is it," I inquire, when "the young lady" is arranging some late chrysanthemums and fern leaves in a large Dresden vase on my table, "how is it that I have never once seen Philip or his father and mother all this time? I am quite well enough to see them now."

That lovely sensitive flush which so promptly answers to every emotion rises on my companion's delicate cheek. She pauses a little before answering.

Then with a sigh,—

"Well, you will be obliged to know all about it sooner or later. But promise not to be very angry, or very much hurt—not to get excited and make yourself worse."

"I will be as quiet as a lamb!"

"When you proved to have fever it was at first feared that it would turn out to be typhus, and Mrs. Heron, who is extremely nervous about infectious illness, persuaded her husband to go away at once."

"Oh! and Philip?"

"I suppose there is more wounded self-love and offended pride in my tone than I intended to betray, for the girl says eagerly, pleadingly,—

"Oh! you must not, indeed, feel hurt with Philip. There are great excuses to be made for him. He stayed here some time after his father and mother left. He was intensely anxious about you. I am sure nothing would have moved him but the entreaties of Miss Corbet."

"What?"

She starts and changes colour at the concentrated fury of my tone.

"It was only natural, you know," she quietly resumes, after a short pause. "Philip could not do anything for you by remaining; and as they were engaged she naturally did not wish him to run any useless risk."

I ask no more questions after that. I think I have heard enough for one day.

CHAPTER VI.

ENGAGED to Philip—already! The "shallow" Philip! Well, I must say she has lost no time about it. She might at all events have waited to see whether I was going to live or die. I suppose she feared I should recover and claim her! But why did she accept me, if she so soon tired of the bargain?

By the way, I am not quite sure that she ever did accept me. Perhaps if I were to charge her with having done so she would say I had "misunderstood" her, like all the rest of the world.

There is more wounded vanity than despairing love in my reflections; and the effect of pique on heart-wounds is very much like that of carbolic

acid on flesh wounds. It makes them smart most abominably, but prevents festering and promotes healing.

I suppose it is my growing intimacy with Dr. Hart which suggests this surgical comparison.

He comes in earlier than usual on the morning after my nurse's unwilling disclosures, and finds her with me, having just brought in a basket of fruit and a bunch of flowers.

"Well, doctor," I exclaim, "I have learnt at last all that I am responsible for. I little imagined that I was emptying Maple Hill of its inhabitants, and spreading desolation around me."

"It was a false alarm," he says, laughing. "But perhaps it is quite as well that we should have had the field to ourselves while there was danger, though not of the sort they feared."

"But it is quite time I was off now; the place ought to be disinfected and restored to its owners."

"The infection arising from a broken arm is not alarming."

"But seriously—when may I undertake the journey? I am uncomfortable at the thought of having put everybody about in this way."

"In a week or ten days I think you may venture. You must keep your arm in a sling for some time yet, but with ordinary care that need not, of course, prevent your travelling. As to the good people who ran away from you your conscience need not be very tender. If they had listened to me, and not taken a panic they might have been here now."

"There was one, at all events, fortunately for me, who did not run away," I remark, glancing at my nurse.

"I do not deserve any credit for that," she answered hastily. "I was not a free agent."

"Would you have forsaken me if you had been?"

"That is scarcely a fair question," she says, her colour rising.

"Dr. Hart, I appeal to you. Do you think she would have run away like the rest?"

"No!" he replies, emphatically. "From my knowledge of Miss Rosalind, I don't think any risk to herself would drive her away from anyone she could help."

"I am afraid you are not quite so well to day, after all!" observes my gentle nurse, as the door closes behind the doctor.

"Oh, yes, I am—better, unfortunately. What made you think me not so well?"

"Because I heard such a very, very deep sigh when Dr. Hart spoke of your soon being able to travel."

"I don't relish the prospect of approaching banishment, that is all."

"Banishment! when you are going back to society, and all the interests of active life! I should have thought being imprisoned here was the real banishment."

"See how different the actual always is from the ideal. You think I am to be congratulated on returning to hard work in solitary chambers where there is literally no one to care whether I live or die, except my old charwoman, to whom my life is important as representing so many additional shillings per week in her pocket. I, who have so long been accustomed to your care and companionship."

"That is all very well," she answers, with the simple, straightforward composure which is not the least of her charms. "I owed you a 'good turn,' you know, and I am glad, most glad, that you think I have been able to pay it. But now you ought to be glad to go; of course this mode of life would soon become very tiresome."

"Not to me, if it did not become tiresome to you. I have never yet thanked you for all your goodness, and I fear I shall not be able to make you understand how grateful I am."

"There is nothing whatever to be grateful for," she answers, and by her arch smile I know she remembers that she is quoting my own words once addressed to her. "I would have done as much for any one, and then you know I ran no risk."

"But in all probability you saved my life. Yet, so strangely are we situated," I add, after a pause, "that I do not even know under what name to thank you."

I flatter myself that this is a highly ingenious way of insinuating the question, which I hesitate to ask outright, but she baffles me.

"My name is Rosalind," she says simply, and then I remember that Dr. Hart has addressed her as "Miss Rosalind" more than once.

"Rosalind!" I repeat inquiringly.

"I had rather you did not ask me any more," she answers, very hurriedly and sadly. "I am not at liberty to explain any of the things concerning myself, which very likely seem strange to you."

Her words recall all the old puzzles, of which I have almost lost sight in our later intimacy. Our strange meeting, her determination that I should not know where she lived, her midnight interview with Heron—surely never were people so oddly thrown together!

And then another perplexing point recurs to me which passed unheeded at the time in my own astonishment at what she had to tell.

I mean the perfect composure with which she announced Philip's engagement.

I will try the experiment of introducing his name again.

"I don't think I have ever asked you," I begin speaking carelessly, but watching her closely, "where all my affectionate friends went to when I frightened them away from their own neighbourhood."

"Mr. and Mrs. Heron are at Barmouth."

"And Philip?"

"Philip is not very far from them," she continues, with the same unruffled tranquillity. "He went down to Lord Caradoc's Welsh seat with the Groves and Miss Corbet. Miss Groves, I believe, is engaged to Lord Caradoc."

Conversation flags a little, and then Rosalind fetches me some letters, which she says she had forgotten.

Among them is one from Laura Beauchamp, the last in the packet but the earliest in date.

"I heard yesterday from an old acquaintance of mine," writes my cousin, "who I find has become a new acquaintance of yours. I trust she is nothing more, though she makes most strict inquiries about you."

"She was at school with me, and even at that age I think such a calculating head was never set on woman's shoulders. You know me too well to suppose I am prejudiced against her because she is so pretty—on the contrary, I rather like her, but really she is awfully dangerous!"

I look again at the date of Laura's letter. It was written a few days after my declaration to Honora.

So now, I suppose, the whole tangled web of her conduct lies unravelled before me. She led me on in pique at Lord Caradoc's desertion—she kept my fate trembling in the balance while she ascertained my precise value in the matrimonial market—and she threw me over at once and for ever on discovering how insignificant that was.

Well, it is a lesson—the sort of lesson which often leaves men cynics and sceptics as regards the faith and tenderness and virtue of women, and might have done the same for me had I not found an antidote in learning by heart the patience and simplicity and dignity of Rosalind.

But to what purpose? since she is only a living enigma!

It is my last evening at Maple Hill. I have no longer any shadow of excuse for remaining, yet I am unreasonably, unaccountably reluctant to go away.

I have walked in the gardens daily of late—sometimes even getting so far as the park; and once or twice Hart has asked me to drive with him.

During this rapid progress Rosalind has made me shorter visits, and at longer intervals, though, on returning to the house after any absence, I generally find that she has been to my rooms, and left there some graceful token of her presence.

Tea had been served, and Rosalind, who had

entered the room to discharge some slight office, was about to depart.

"Will you not stay and pour out my tea for me once more—this last evening?" I ask, entreatingly.

"I think you can do it for yourself now, quite easily," she says.

"It is not half so refreshing when I do it for myself. Come, why should you refuse me this one hour, when you have given me so many—and when it must be so long before I am likely to trouble you again?"

"Well!" she answers, slowly, taking the chair opposite to mine, "it is, as you say, for the last time."

"I don't think that was exactly what I said. I did indeed say that this was our last evening here—under these circumstances. But nothing shall ever make me believe that you are never to pour out tea for me again."

"Nothing is less likely, though!"

"You said something very like that once before," I reply, provokingly. "Don't you remember the first time you made tea for me—and how fully persuaded you were then that it was the last?"

I have succeeded in my cruel design of shaking her composure. The colour rushes to her pale cheeks, and the fingers she clasps nervously together are trembling.

"You may possibly recollect, too, bidding me a final good-bye, and saying that *nothing was less likely* than that we should ever meet again!"

"Well, and did it not prove so?" she retorts, with sudden spirit. "Did we ever meet again—in the ordinary course of things? Did you ever even see me till I came to take your nurse's place?"

"What has been maybe. I would break the other arm to be thrown again upon your care—if there were no other way."

I wish the excellent Withers on the very coldest pinnacle of Mont Blanc. For her entrance at this moment with the tray (I am still subject to the early hours, and "little and often" despotism of convalescence) prevents me from finding out what answer Rosalind will vouchsafe to this hazardous speech.

"How often I shall wish myself back here, when I am shut up in those dingy, dusty, lonely rooms of mine!" I remark, after contemplating for some moments the trees waving beyond the still uncurtained window, the bright fire flickering in the grate—the graceful figure and fair face opposite to me; all so homelike, and now so familiar.

"You think so at present," is the quiet answer. "But in the pleasure of returning to active life you will soon forget all this, or only remember it as belonging to a time when you were very helpless and uncomfortable."

"Is that the way you remember?" I ask, earnestly. "Will you forget all the hours we have spent together, or only remember them as a time when you were wearied and worn out by the exacting demands of a helpless invalid?"

She makes no answer, and looking scrutinisingly at her half-averted face, I see to my consternation that she is crying—she, ordinarily so calm, so tranquil, so self-possessed.

Two rapid steps place me by her side. She rises in agitation, and would hurry from the room, but I stand before her, and detain her.

"Rosalind—Rosalind, are those tears for me?"

She controls herself by a violent effort.

"No!" she answers, with a smile of indescribable sadness, "they are for myself. You little dream how much I have to endure. You little know what a refuge, what a resource it has been, to forget everything else in care for you! And then your words reminded me of how soon it would all be over; and the thought of the old life coming back, unchanged, unbroken except by the memory of what had been so different, seemed more than I could bear!"

"But need not, will not, must not be so. I shall return—perhaps very soon. They will all be glad to see me clothed and in my right mind."

I continue trying for both our sakes to speak more lightly than I feel.

"Come as soon or come as often as you may you will not see me."

"But that will be the chief object of my coming! After all that has passed you cannot refuse me that smallest privilege of friendship."

"Long since I told you that friendship was not for me. Twice we have been thrown together by the strangest chance. It must not happen a third time, and again I beg you, as I did before, to conceal our having met from everyone."

"But that is now impossible," I urge, in astonishment. "This time it is already known to others."

"Only to Dr. Hart and Withers, and they can both be depended upon. They know the necessity for what I ask."

"You trust Dr. Hart and Withers—will you not also trust me? I do not ask from curiosity. I want to share your burdens. You have become so necessary and so dear to me that whatever they may be I shall not think them a feather's weight if you also give me yourself."

She turns white, and trembles like a leaf.

"I—I do not understand—what you are saying."

"I am telling you that I love you, Rosalind, and asking you to be my wife."

"You mean this—you ask me to be your wife, not even knowing my name or my story—only meeting me in this humiliating concealment," she cries, vehemently.

"I know you, Rosalind. That is enough for me. If you desire it I will not even ask your secret again till all yours are mine and all mine are yours by right."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, with a sob that seems to come from a breaking heart, "this is love indeed! and it must not be mine."

"It is yours, to all eternity. You cannot alienate it. You may refuse me, but I will never give you up—never cease trying to win you—unless you can look me in the face and say you do not love me."

A deep crimson chases the whiteness from her cheeks. Her eyes are fixed on the ground, her hands slightly clasped.

"I—I—Heaven help me! I cannot say it."

"Then you must be my wife."

"Never—never—never!"

"You are bound, at all events, to give me some reason for refusing me."

She hesitates a moment in deep, anxious, painful thought. At last her answer comes faint and low.

"To-morrow, before you go, I will tell you."

And as the last word passes her lips she draws away the hands I have taken in my own, and hurries from the room.

CHAPTER VII.

"MISS ROSALIND's compliments, sir, and if you can spare half-an-hour now she will be glad to see you."

I look up in astonishment at Withers' grave and unmoved countenance as she makes this formal announcement; but, of course, instantly prepare to obey the summons.

"You will want your hat, sir," she says, lingering for a moment at the entrance of my room.

Then she goes downstairs, out of the hall door, and round to a part of the gardens which I have scarcely noticed before, shut off from the park by a light iron fence and high shrubbery, and bounded on the side adjoining the house by a high, weather-stained, red brick wall.

In this wall there is a door, which Withers opens with a huge key, and then we find ourselves in an old-fashioned flagged court, quite shut in by two other walls resembling that through which we entered, but lined on the inner side with climbing plants and shrubs, and brightened by several beds of gay autumn flowers. The fourth side of the square is formed by a wing of Maple Hill House, so built as to form practically a separate dwelling, with its own entrance and small hall, into which Withers leads the way.

Then she knocks gently at a door on our left, and it is opened by Rosalind herself.

She is pale and sad. There are dark hollows under her eyes, and the hand which for an instant rests in mine is cold as ice.

Withdrawing it with a sigh, she takes me to the further end of a long, low, simply furnished room with books and flowers about it, a well-used work-table, and an open piano.

Leaning back in a large armchair, and almost lost in the voluminous folds of a fleecy shawl, is a small, shadowy, delicate-looking woman, with very eager, brilliant eyes.

"Mother," says Rosalind, to my unspeakable astonishment, "this is Mr. Poynts! He has come to see you, and say good-bye to us."

"I am glad to see any friend of Rosalind's," says a soft, tremulous voice. "I think my daughter told me you had a severe accident, and were very ill. I hope you have quite recovered."

"Quite; thanks to Dr. Hart's skill, and your daughter's invaluable nursing."

"I was pleased that she could be of use in your illness. I am too weak to be of use to anyone now. I was quite willing to spare Rosalind, though I missed her very much."

Rosalind herself is leaning against the back of her mother's chair, listening, it seems to me, with strained, feverish eagerness, to every word that falls from those tremulous lips.

"You were very kind. I can quite understand how much you must have missed her. I owe you many thanks."

"You were welcome. But I am glad to have her once more with me again. She is all I have left in the world now that her father is dead. You know," she adds, in quicker, firmer tones, leaning forward with a look of intent inquiry, and suddenly laying one transparent hand on mine—"you know I was his wife!"

"Of course!" I answer, with an energy proportioned to my utter ignorance and extreme confusion. Then, as soon as I can collect my scattered wits, I introduce some utterly irrelevant and unimportant subject.

For a few moments she talks like any ordinarily well-mannered, well-informed woman.

But at every pause, with the persistent recurrence of a chorus, comes some reference to Rosalind's father, and then the plaintive, unvarying appeal,—

"You know I was his wife!"

This goes on for about twenty minutes. The painful impression made by my visit would be almost intolerable but for the love so plainly visible between mother and child—so wistful and dependent on the one side, so tender and protecting on the other.

At last Rosalind makes a slight, almost imperceptible gesture; and bidding her mother good-bye, I follow her from the room.

In silence she walks through the little hall, taking up the key of the garden door, which Withers had left on the table. In silence we cross the flagged court and re-enter the Hall garden.

Then, when we are safe from all other eyes and ears, she turns to me with a passionate, expressive gesture of her hand towards the spot we have left.

"There," she says, "is the secret of my life. There is the sacred, dreadful tie that will for ever forbid my forming any other."

"I deny it," I exclaim, impulsively. "You have only to trust me. Now that you have let me see the nature of your burden I am more anxious than ever to help you bear it."

"You are generous," she replies; "but do you think I could allow you to sacrifice yourself so? I must bear my grief as I have always borne it—alone."

"That is impossible now. If you knew how truly I love you you would understand that any trouble of yours must henceforth be mine also. The only question is whether we shall share them together or apart."

"I would far rather have died," she answers, mournfully, "than have brought trouble on you."

For a few moments we walk up and down the

broad avenue in silence, side by side. The trees are showering gold and russet and crimson leaves at our feet. The air that plays on our faces is the moist aromatic breath of autumn woods. Overhead, through the fast thinning boughs, a streak of blue sky is visible.

Presently Rosalind raises her eyes to mine, with the look of one who has taken a hard resolution.

"I have still much to tell you," she says, slowly. "If what you have just seen had reconciled you, as I hoped it would, to the necessity for our parting, I should have been spared the rest of my wretched story. But you have a right to know all the truth. My father and Mr. Heron were half-brothers."

"Good Heaven! Then you are Philip's cousin!"

"Yes, I am a Heron, though I am not allowed to use my father's name. I wonder they have not forbidden me to wear his ring," she adds, bitterly—just glancing at the blue signet round which I wore such baseless fancies.

"My grandfather was married twice; the second time rather late in life, to his housekeeper, who had, I believe, been his first wife's maid."

"My father, who was then sixteen, was furious, and there were bitter, bitter quarrels, which ended in his leaving home, never to return."

"When his education was completed he went abroad, living for a year or two at all the great art centres in turn, and so indulging his passion for painting and travel that the very idea of a settled life in England became distasteful to him. He had no communication whatever with his family, his remittances being forwarded through the steward to any foreign banker he might name; and even when my grandfather died he was not summoned home."

"Mrs. Heron and her son (Philip's father) of course left this house. Some provision had been made for them, but I have been told that she was extravagant, and that they got into great difficulties. Maple Hill was shut up, and, as before, my father's business was entirely transacted by the steward."

"Meantime he had married the orphan daughter of an English chaplain who was studying painting at Munich. Their engagement was short; my mother had no relatives and few friends to consult, and after their marriage they at once left for Italy."

"My father was eccentric and reserved. He made few acquaintances and had no correspondents, and I don't suppose even the fact of his marriage was known except to the few persons gathered round him in his temporary resting-places."

(Continued on page 572.)

BERYL'S MARRIAGE.

—201—

CHAPTER XV.

It was on one of the loveliest of spring days that Sir Denis Adair and his bride returned to Heron Dyke. Their home-coming had more than once been postponed, till Mrs. Dent began to think they meant to take up their abode abroad for good and all, and she was delighted when, on the third date named, she received no letter of excuses, but a few lines from Beryl saying they were really on their way, and that as Heron Dyke was only two hours' journey from London she hoped before long to come and spend a day with her aunt.

Mrs. Dent put the note down with a sigh; she was not a very clever woman, but her perceptions were keen enough where those she loved were concerned, and she had felt for a long time past that all was not well with Beryl.

Lady Adair's letters were few and short. They were always affectionate, and never failed to notice any little news her aunt had sent of

home matters; but she rarely mentioned her husband, and she left some of Aunt Julia's questions unanswered.

The kindly Mrs. Dent had a misgiving that the hurried marriage had not turned out quite so well as she had hoped. She did not blame Sir Denis; Beryl was so sensitive, so ready to feel hurt needlessly, only the girl had been most passionately in love, she had given her whole heart to her bridegroom, and full well Aunt Julia knew that if Denis Adair had failed to realize his wife's expectations her awakening would be a bitter one.

As she took her place by her husband's side in a first-class carriage at Dover Beryl was feeling sadder than she had done since leaving Paris. Alas! she could not help remembering what this home coming might have meant for her. How much she would have looked forward to seeing Denis' old home but for the awful barrier between them, raised by her own hands on the evening of their wedding day, and which it seemed now as though no power on earth could overthrow.

Sir Denis and Lady Adair had been married over four months, but they were no wiser nearer each other. They had gone to the South of France on leaving Paris. Later they had visited Italy and seen all the lions of Rome. They had travelled continually from place to place, and seen enough sights to qualify them to write a guide-book. They had rushed about chiefly because they could not bear to be quiet and have leisure to realize the breach between them, and probably neither would have suggested a return to England but that Beryl caught an attack of malaria while in Italy, and the English doctor who attended her insisted on her going home as soon as she was well enough to travel. Mrs. Dent little knew the return had only been postponed twice because each time Beryl seemed still too weak to attempt the long journey. Lady Adair was careful not even to mention her illness in writing to the Oaks.

At last Sir Denis took the law into his own hands. He had a private interview with the doctor, and at its close told his wife they would start for home the next day.

"I don't feel well enough to travel."

"Beryl," said Denis very gravely, "Dr. Clyde says you will never be better while we remain here, and that he has told you repeatedly you ought to leave Italy, even if you travel only ten miles a day, and that in an invalid carriage, till we get away from this squish country."

Beryl looked fixedly on the floor.

"Well!"

"It is not 'well' at all," replied Sir Denis sternly; "you have wilfully neglected the doctor's orders, as though you did not wish to get well."

"I don't think I do particularly."

"Beryl!"

"Well," she asked slowly, "is there anything to make me anxious for a long life? If I died you would have your freedom and be able to—"

"Don't," said Denis Adair hoarsely. "I know you misjudge me, Beryl. I know you well-nigh hate me, but I have not deserved that last taunt. I would have been your devoted husband, your faithful lover, had you suffered me. As it is, I insist on your taking proper care of your own health, and I assure you that, so far from wishing for my freedom, if I were so unfortunate as to survive you I should live and die a widower."

Of course he had been too unhappy in this marriage to contemplate another, thought Beryl angrily, which was really rather hard on Sir Denis. However, after this she made no more objections; her husband took the planning of their journey upon himself, and with so much success that when they landed at Dover Lady Adair was not only none the worse but really far stronger than when they left Italy.

They went on to Heron Dyke by a local train and so did not need pass through London, for which Beryl was thankful.

Had they stayed even a few hours in town Mrs. Dent would certainly have come to meet them, and Beryl did not want to see her aunt yet.

So the husband and wife who were "strangers

yet" sat almost silent for the short journey in the slow local train; Sir Denis had engaged the whole carriage, so in spite of the frequent stoppages, they had not to fear intrusion.

They were near the station for Heron Dyke when he suddenly put down his newspaper and said in rather a constrained manner,—

"I hear the people have been preparing a welcome for us, Beryl; there'll be triumphal arches, and cheering, and all that sort of thing."

"Indeed," said Beryl, dreamily.

"It's rather a farce under the circumstances," returned Sir Denis, "but they can't guess our relations; no doubt they think us a very happy pair. I was down once or twice just before our wedding, and—no doubt I gave them a wrong impression. I don't often ask a favour of you, but I should be glad if—"

He stopped abruptly, and Beryl had to help him out.

"You want me to seem pleased at their tokens of good will. You need not be afraid, Denis, I wouldn't hurt your tenants' feelings for the world; besides, I am getting quite used to acting a part."

She had wounded him terribly; she had not meant the last words as a stab, but they pierced his heart. Still there were things that must be said, and so he persevered.

"I confess I should prefer not to take the whole neighbourhood into our confidence," he said coldly. "We shall probably be very little at Heron Dyke, and I should like the people who have known me from a boy not to suspect what a wretched business we have made of things."

"I have no intention of enlightening them," said Beryl, coldly. "Pray have you any very intimate friends in the neighbourhood?"

"No close friends; our nearest neighbours are the Blakes. He is a self-made man, and you won't have much in common with his wife. Still, I shouldn't like to hurt their feelings by declining to know them; but you need not see much of them. An old friend of mine is Mr. Blake's secretary. By-the-way, he is a namesake of yours. Have you a cousin Dick?"

"No," said Beryl, who did not think it necessary to say she possessed an uncle of that name. "I have no cousins except the Dents and Sir Charles Lester."

"Well, Dick Chesney is a sort of chum of mine. I don't say he's a very admirable person, but he's very pleasant company, and I feel sorry for him, he has expensive tastes and no means of gratifying them. He was very down on his luck when I introduced him to Mr. Blake; he is acting as secretary, companion, and social guide to him now."

Beryl felt little doubt that the Dick Chesney in question was her uncle; but in spite of Mrs. Dent's revelations she had never shared the family detestation of "Uncle Dick."

She understood Aunt Julia naturally hated the idea of a spendthrift enjoying her father's wealth, and of course it was very wrong of the young man to have wasted his substance on riotous living, and have married a woman old enough to be his mother; but Beryl had felt the constraints of middle-class formality herself enough not to condemn Dick utterly because the Dents disapproved of him. She was quite ready to hold out the hand of fellowship to the prodigal if Denis wished it.

"I shouldn't care to earn my living like that," she said, *à propos* of Dick Chesney's occupation; "are the Blakes nice to him?"

"I expect so; they are very kindly people; now, in another moment we shall be at the station."

It was not on the Adair property so there was no demonstration; but they had hardly driven two miles when they came to a triumphal arch round which a crowd had assembled.

A ringing cheer was given for Sir Denis and his bride, while a venerable white-haired man read an address of welcome, which was rather interrupted by the sound of the church bells, which suddenly started out into a joyous peal.

Joy and sorrow struggled together in Beryl's heart; joy that while she lived no other woman could be so near to Denis as she was; sorrow for the love dream which had been so rudely shattered

by the strange girl's revelations on that bleak December morning which seemed so terribly long ago.

After that the lanes seemed literally lined with people, and when they passed through the lodge gates the crowd grew even denser; but Beryl hardly heeded them now.

A most wonderful thing had happened, and she held her breath almost in amazement, for the gabled lodge was the very one she had seen in her well-remembered dream. Could it be that the house she was thinking (in her dream) of leaving for ever was her husband's house?

Sir Denis sprang out of the carriage and assisted her to alight, while a deep cheer went up from many voices; but Lady Adair was trembling from head to foot.

She could not be mistaken; it was the house of her dream, she could have sworn to it; even the slightest detail was the same.

She hardly heard her husband's words thanking the crowd for their welcome; she knew vaguely that cake and wine were produced, and the health of the happy (?) pair was drunk with acclamations, and Denis stood on the terrace-steps with her hand drawn through his arm while he made a brief speech.

It was over at last; the crowd had dispersed, and Lady Adair stood in her own room with the housekeeper in attendance; the latter functionary had engaged one of her nieces as maid to her new mistress, but she would allow no one but herself to dress Beryl on this first night of her home-coming.

Lady Adair cared more for dress now than she had ever done as Miss Chesney; perhaps she felt she would fain look her best, that the world might not suspect she had been wooed and married not for herself but her fortune.

She had been beautiful in the old days at the Oaks, but she was ten times lovelier now! It was not a happy face; no one could have called it so, but it had gained wonderfully in feeling and expression.

To-night she wore a soft flowing dress of white crepe woollen stuff, trimmed with a little coarse lace; natural forget-me-nots at her breast and in the coils of her golden hair—a simple costume for a great heiress, but one which suited her to perfection.

The old housekeeper's eyes were not quite dry as they rested on her new mistress.

"May you be very happy at the Court, my lady," she said respectfully; "as happy as you are now."

Beryl felt sadly that if she were never happier than she was now her share of felicity would be slight indeed, but she made some kindly reply to the old servant and then went downstairs to the drawing-room.

Sir Denis was waiting for her there; dinner was announced, and the pair sat down for the first time to a meal in their own house.

They talked about indifferent subjects, for the butler was in attendance, and they were not free to be silent.

When the man withdrew a painful pause followed. Beryl longed to tell Denis she was sorry for those taunts spoken on their wedding-night and to ask him if they could not begin their married life afresh; but the reserve, which was in her almost an affliction, prevented her speaking frankly.

As for Denis he was thinking how beautiful was the casket whose jewel he had lost.

Beryl's face and form were lovelier than ever. Most it be that he could never win herself, her heart and soul!

"To-morrow is Thursday," he said, at last, "and no one will call until we have 'appeared at church,' so you will have a few days of freedom, Beryl."

"That's well," she answered, "for I shall want to get used to this large house and learn to find my way about."

"It is a big, rambling old pile," replied Denis; "but I love it dearly. I was born here, and no other place could really be home to me."

And he had sacrificed her to Heron Dyke. That was the thought in Beryl's heart; knowing full well he did not love her, he had married her just that her money might restore the faded

glories of the Court and rescue the home of his ancestors from the clutches of Mr. Blake.

Beryl's eyes wandered round the drawing-room when she returned to it. There was something strangely familiar to her about it. Then she recognised her own piano and several dainty trifles from her little sitting-room at the Oaks. Denis must have sent for them to make the place seem homelike to her.

"It is just as though he loved me really," thought the girl with a little sigh. "Oh I wish that girl had never found me out and told me about her sister. I was happy before I doubted Denis, and my being wretched can't alter things or bring Nell back to life." She always looked on "Nell" as dead; Beryl had believed her dying, or she would never have married Sir Denis Adair.

But they were not left alone even till Monday. Denis met the village doctor the following day, and insisted on bringing him home to lunch. Was it really to gratify Mr. Carter, or because he dreaded a long day *tête-à-tête* with his unloved wife?

Mr. Carter was sixty turned, but stronger and more energetic than many younger men. He came of a good old Kentish family, and there was something of high-bred courtesy in the way in which he greeted the bride.

"I always wanted to see a Lady Adair at Heron Dyke," he told her when Denis left them alone for a moment. "I have known your husband from infancy; his father and mother were my life-long friends, and I always knew Sir Denis would settle down into a model squire and landlord when once he had secured a wife."

"He was in no hurry," said Beryl. "Sir Denis was turned thirty when I met him."

"Well," said Mr. Carter with a smile, "perhaps Providence reserved him for you, and if you will forgive an old man's freedom, my lady, you were certainly worth waiting for."

Lunch went off very well. It was odd how the presence of a third person broke down all the constraint and stiffness which made Beryl dread her *tête-à-tête* meals with Denis. Conversation was brisk, and she took her full share in it. Mr. Carter explaining such local allusions as would have been lost on a stranger.

"Mr. Blake was furious with you, Sir Denis," said the surgeon with a droll smile (the servants had left the room); "in fact, I can't tell which he railed against most, yourself or Lady Adair; but poor man he has found a new trouble now which has temporarily driven his old grievance out of his head."

"I hope his wife is not ill," said Denis promptly. "Mrs. Blake never struck me as a strong woman, and I can't imagine what he would do without her."

"Mrs. Blake is well, and they have the best report of the twins. No illness has nothing to do with the calamity at the Hall."

"You can't mean that he's lost his fortune; but no, he's retired from business years ago, and he was far too prudent to speculate rashly."

"Or wisely either," agreed the surgeon; "poor Blake was the embodiment of caution. That's what makes his present trouble so inexplicable."

"You are making me very curious," said Beryl to their guest; "pray what has happened to Mr. Blake?"

"He has lost a series of articles which have disappeared under such strange circumstances as to leave no doubt they were stolen. And stolen moreover by someone conversant with the ways and customs of the family at the Hall."

Beryl had a most uncomfortable moment, she really could not help it. Remember she had heard of Dick Chesney all her life as the black sheep of the family, and for an instant she asked herself if he had wilfully robbed his employer. But in this she wronged Dick. Of the present robberies he was entirely innocent.

"Tell us all about it," said Sir Denis; "after a ghost story there is nothing more entertaining than a really mysterious robbery."

"You'd better not use the word 'entertaining' when you talk to Mr. Blake about his misfortunes," returned Mr. Carter, "for he's uncommonly glum about them. I think he'd feel better if he could only suspect someone, but as

it happens there's not a creature against whom he can get a shred of evidence."

"But what has he lost?"

"I'm coming to that. Some weeks ago—two months, perhaps, for I never was good at dates—Mrs. Blake lost her purse. She happened to have cashed a cheque for the housekeeping bills that morning, and so was unusually well-provided with ready money."

"And the purse was stolen?"

"I'm not saying that; indeed, she first missed it out of doors, and I should say the chances are that she really genuinely lost it. Mr. Blake made a great fuss, but declined to offer a reward. He said no one would bring back a purse which contained over twenty pounds for a miserable five or ten guineas. He's a sharp-tempered man, and I believe he read his wife a long lecture on her folly and extravagance. Anyway, Mrs. Blake took the matter terribly to heart. She fretted herself ill, and I was called in."

"But the robbery?" persisted Sir Denis.

"I'm coming to that. The third day I went to the Hall Mr. Blake told me he had missed his gold watch—a valuable article, presented him on his leaving Manchester. He was positive it had been taken from his dressing-room in the night. He made no stir about it because his wife had taken the loss of her purse so much to heart he really was afraid of alarming her. Well, I suppose, encouraged by Blake's silence, the thief pursued his tricks. A signet-ring and a set of diamond studs went next, then a bag of gold from the desk in Blake's business room. Then came some weeks of peace, and last of all a diamond necklace, which he had purchased for his eldest girl, was taken from the strong room."

"From the strong room!" exclaimed Denis; "it sounds impossible."

"It's a fact nevertheless. That secretary fellow there, who seems the only person with a head on his shoulders, made a first-rate suggestion. He said as the necklace was taken between midnight and breakfast (the butler looked up before he went to bed, and found the strong-room door standing open in the morning) the thief must be a member of the household, and he told Mr. Blake it would be more satisfactory for himself and the servants if their things were searched in the presence of a policeman. He put his keys on the table, and said he was willing to be the first. The servants couldn't well refuse to follow his example. I happened to be calling there when the policeman came, and Blake invited me to be present at the search. Every single person in the house gave up their keys and had their possessions thoroughly examined."

"And they found the necklace?"

"Not a trace of it. Blake can't think what to do. If he makes a clean sweep of the servants he loses all chance of getting back his property. Meanwhile he knows he has a dishonest person in his house, and can't tell what he's the next spoil taken."

"I don't wonder Mrs. Blake is ill," said Beryl, feelingly; "it is enough to worry a nervous woman into her grave."

"Oddly enough," said Mr. Carter, "Mrs. Blake does not seem near so troubled about these thefts as she was at the loss of her purse. She is now progressing favourably, and if all goes well I hope she will be about again next week. Meanwhile Blake himself is in a state of panic. Every valuable he can lay hold on he carries off to his banker's; and when I met Chesney to-day he assured me they would soon be reduced to eating with steel forks, for Mr. Blake feared to have the silver ones any longer in daily use."

CHAPTER XVI.

MR. TULLOCH was a man of quick intelligence, and Audrey Nugent's change of colour was not lost on him.

"You have heard this story before," he said, sharply; "why didn't you say so, and save my time?"

If she had looked frightened her chance of becoming Mr. Tulloch's employee would have been gone for ever; but Audrey had quickly recovered

her colour, and now she turned to the Inquiry Agent with something like a smile.

"I never heard what you have told me before; but I have heard of Heron Dyke; the only enemy I possess in the world lives near there."

"Man or woman?"

"Woman," for she was thinking of Beryl Adair, quite forgetting that though she had played a cruel and treacherous part to both the Adaids neither had shown her the least illwill.

"And you're afraid to go near, eh?" pursued Mr. Tulloch.

"On the contrary, I should like to meet her. I will go to Heron Dyke to-morrow, Mr. Tulloch. Only I must disguise my face, and I must not be known to your client by my real name."

"What is the name of your enemy?"

"Must I tell you?"

"Yes; I am going to trust you with my secrets, so why should you not return the compliment?"

"Well, her name is Lady Adair, and I was a friend of her husband's."

"Ah," Mr. Tulloch probably understood the word "friend" for "love," but he did not say so.

"Well, my client is a Mr. Blake, and the Adaids are his nearest neighbours; but you are not likely to see much of them; they have only just returned from their honeymoon, and are not at all intimate with the Blakes. For the rest, I never let my ladies use their own names when working for me; you can keep your own initials A. N. and be Ann Newcome instead of Audrey Nugent. It strikes me you may work all the better in a place where you have some interest, at all events, I am willing to give you a trial."

He rang for the boy in buttons, who reported that sixteen more ladies had arrived.

"Wait five minutes," returned his master, "till I am safely out of the court with this lady, then tell the others my choice is made, so that I need not see them."

In a very short time Audrey and Mr. Tulloch were driven to a large shop between Covent Garden and Leicester-square, which made theatrical costumes and wigs a speciality, and was also learned in all "make ups."

Mr. Tulloch had an interview with the lady-manager, who then came to inspect Audrey, and after looking her all over from head to foot made an unexpected suggestion.

"You say the lady of the house is in delicate health; surely she would be glad of a nurse; nothing would disguise Mademoiselle better than the costume of a nursery sister."

"I understand nursing fairly well," replied Audrey, "and it would be an economical arrangement as well as I should only want one costume instead of a complete outfit."

Mr. Tulloch was much taken with the idea. Mrs. Blake, he understood, was in a very nervous state; in such a condition it was advisable she should have a nurse. The disguise would be better than describing the visitor as "the child of one of Mr. Blake's old friends," since, considering the rich man's origin, his old friends were presumably in the lower walks of life.

It was very quickly settled, and then Audrey withdrew to another room, where, under the direction of the Lady Superintendent, her hair was darkened judiciously till it became a dull, lustreless brown, then her eyelashes and lashes received similar attention. She hardly knew herself when she looked in the glass.

"Don't be alarmed," said the shopwoman, kindly. "Come round to us when you want to return to your former colouring and we'll soon put things right for you. Now for the costume."

Audrey was profoundly ignorant of the uniforms of nursing sisters, so she left the matter to Madame, who was careful to select a costume which, while generally resembling a nurse's garb, was yet not that of any particular institution.

With the plain close-fitting black bonnet, relieved by a little white cap and white strings, the long floating veil at the back, the simple black princess dress, fine linen apron and snowy collar and cuffs, Audrey felt herself another creature; surely even Nell herself would not know her.

Madame and Mr. Tulloch congratulated each other on her appearance, and then orders were given for a complete outfit to be despatched to

Heron Dyke, and the Nurse(?) left the shop with her employer.

"Mr. Blake happens to be in town," said the latter, "and I promised to let him know whom I had selected, so we may as well call at his hotel."

Mr. Blake received them in his private room, and the inquiry office proprietor briefly explained his change of tactics.

"I'm glad of it," said Blake, frankly, "for I couldn't for the life of me think of any old friend whose daughter would be likely to come on a visit, and my wife, Heaven bless her, is as sharp as a needle. She can't keep a secret, and she has a mortal horror of female detectives, so I didn't dare let her into the secret; but if I'd passed Miss Newcome off as a friend's daughter she'd have put me through such a cross examination as must have made me betray everything."

"Well, you can call Miss Newcome 'Nurse,' she prefers it, and it will come easier. Mark my words, Mr. Blake, she'll do your business."

"I am sure I hope so," said Mr. Blake, with something like a groan; "nothing has gone right with me lately, Mr. Tulloch; you remember my disappointment in December?"

The other man nodded solemnly; Mr. Blake was not of a reserved nature; it really seemed to do him good to dilate on his wrongs.

"Yes; Sir Denis Adair, whom I regarded as almost my son-in-law, actually married an heiress. I did my level best to part them; paid a good round annuity to a young Lady Adair had trifled with to open the bride's eyes, but I suppose she wouldn't have them opened, for they were married in spite of it, and I wasted my money."

He was telling Audrey two things; he was the man who found the money to bribe her to plot against Denis Adair's happiness, and he really believed he had a grievance against the baronet.

Audrey was thankful for her disguise and change of name. No doubt the man who was Mr. Blake's agent last December often visited at his house. Well, it would be hard indeed for him to recognise Audrey Nugent in the quiet, dark-haired hospital nurse, Ann Newcome.

"We had better travel down together," said Mr. Blake, kindly; "I'll write to my wife that I am bringing a young lady to act as her nurse and companion, then everything will be ready for Miss Newcome. Mrs. Blake is too upset to look after matters, but we have a very good housekeeper, and my secretary, Mr. Chesney, is a host in himself."

"Is Mr. Chesney related to Lady Adair?" asked the nurse, gravely.

"Uncle and heir-at-law. If that chit of a girl had not taken it into her head to thwart all my plans by becoming Lady Adair poor Chesney would have come into fifteen thousand a year at her death."

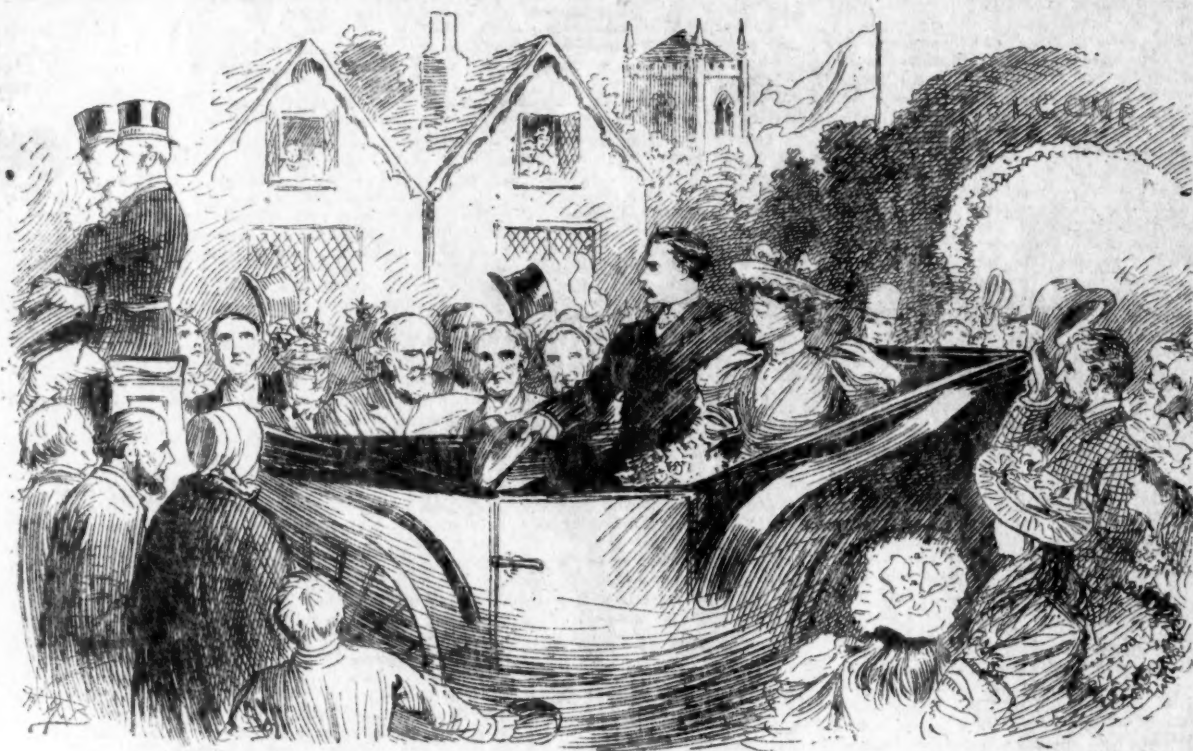
Nurse Ann said nothing. She was thinking after all fate had not been very kind to young Lady Adair since it had planted, well-nigh at her gates, the two people who had most cause to hate her—the man whose dream of wealth she blighted and the woman who cherished against her a fierce passionate jealousy.

Audrey hardly knew how to dispose of herself for the night, but Mr. Tulloch advised her to repair to a modest hotel in Bloomsbury, where, he assured her, bed and breakfast could be had for the modest sum of four shillings.

If Audrey lay awake half the night the fault was more her excitement of mind than any defect of the accommodation. Towards morning she fell into a heavy sleep, which it seemed to her had not lasted an hour when the chamber maid came to call her; and, after a hasty toilet, she descended to the coffee-room. Only an elderly cleric was at the table, and he took no manner of notice of her; save for the sound of his knife and fork she might have fancied herself alone.

And so, in less than twenty-four hours, Audrey Nugent found herself provided with a new name, a new profession, and almost—it seemed to her—a new face.

Audrey was glad to know that Mr. Blake's twin daughters were still at school. She hated girls—that is, girls who were more happily situated than herself.



A RINGING CHEER WAS GIVEN FOR SIR DENIS AND HIS BRIDE.

This strange passionate creature, with her wondrous gifts and intense capacity for love and hate, simply hated those of her own sex on whom fortune had smiled.

Punctually to the minute she met Mr. Blake at Charing-cross; this journey was very different to yesterday's; they travelled first-class, and the self-made man took every care for his companion's comfort.

They were alone most of the time, and Mr. Blake took Nurse Ann more fully into his confidence. He was just the sort of man who delights to expatiate on his grievances to a congenial listener.

Audrey had to hear the whole history of the mortgage on the Court, and the years in which Mr. Blake had cherished the hope of seeing one of his daughters Lady Adair.

"And then, at a moment's notice, he went and married a slip of a girl he'd only known a few months, with an enormous fortune. I saw her in church last Sunday; she's pretty enough, I daresay, but a mere shadow whom a puff of wind would blow away. Adair should have chosen a strong, healthy young woman, for he's the last of his line, and with him the family will be extinct."

"I suppose he was fond of her," said Nurse Ann, rather grudgingly.

"I daresay; she's a sweet face enough, but she's done a lot of harm; robbed me of my dearest hopes, and made her uncle a beggar for the rest of his days. You'll be very much taken with my secretary, nurse; he's a most fascinating young fellow."

"Is Mr. Chesney a bachelor?"

"No, a widower; his wife died just before he came to us; but he doesn't seem particularly disconsolate," and Mr. Blake chuckled heartily. "I tell the wife if my girls were at home I'd not have such a handsome fellow about the place, but while only the old folks are there it can't matter."

Audrey thought if her fears were correct, and Dick Chesney proved the man she had met in

London last December, she, at least, was safe from his fascination. Strange that though she tried to justify her own conduct in the matter of Beryl Chesney she had the utmost contempt for the man who had caused it.

A handsome waggonette was waiting for Mr. Blake, and in conversation with the driver a young man stood whom Audrey at once recognised as her tempter. She was thankful she had been prepared, so that at least the meeting did not come on her with the shock of a surprise; but even so it took all her power of will, all her self-command, not to break down when Mr. Blake introduced her to his secretary.

She knew that Dick Chesney like the rest of the household was to believe her simply Mrs. Blake's nurse-companion, so she was not surprised that he took very little notice of her, and beyond a courteous greeting almost ignored her presence.

"How's the wife, Chesney?" asked Mr. Blake as they drove off.

"Much better; she seemed quite herself last night, and we played bezique all the evening. I really hope, if no more unpleasant surprises occur, Mrs. Blake will soon be quite restored to health."

Nurse Ann was a little curious to see her patient. She found Mr. Tulloch had been quite right in his description.

Mrs. Blake was a pleasant common-place woman of the middle class. No doubt she had in reality been far happier before her husband began to pile up wealth. But still she was honestly proud of his success in life, and enjoyed her luxurious home and the power of buying whatever she fancied. Her manner to Nurse Ann was kindness itself.

"Mr. Carter never said anything to me about a companion, or I should have told him it's what I wanted more than anything. You see, nurse, I'm a great deal alone, and since these robberies I keep thinking of them till I feel almost crazy. I've no intimate friends here, and Mr. Blake wouldn't like me to talk to the servants, so I just have to keep things to

myself, and I get quite dazed with brooding over them. I'm not ill enough to want a nurse; but if you'll go out with me in the pony carriage and let me talk to you when I get bothered I shall be just as pleased as though you nursed me through a bad illness."

"It will be a pleasant holiday for me," said Nurse Ann; "and Mrs. Blake, the story of the robberies is so romantic and mysterious that I shall quite enjoy talking about them and hearing all you can tell me."

Poor Mrs. Blake shook her head.

"It's not the value of the things, nurse, that tries us, it's the mystery, the knowing there's a thief that doesn't mind locks and bars. Mr. Chesney says I'd better put the matter right out of my head, but that's more than flesh and blood can manage."

Decidedly Dick Chesney was unfortunate. Not many nights before on hearing of Mr. Blake's losses, Lady Adair had marvelled if her unknown uncle could be the thief, and now Nurse Ann asked herself if the plausible smooth-spoken secretary could, indeed, explain the seeming mystery. But both were wrong. Dick Chesney would not have objected to steal had he been sure of escaping detection, for his conscience was not sensitive, and he attached no special veneration to the Eighth Commandment; but in this instance Dick was innocent, as innocent as Beryl Adair herself or one of Mr. Blake's twins. The secretary really knew nothing whatever of the robberies which were so trying the peace of his employer's family.

(To be continued.)

When the tomb of Henry VI., of Sicily, who died in 1187, was opened at Palermo, 40 years ago, it was found that on the feet of the dead monarch were shoes whose uppers were of cloth, embroidered with gold and pearls, while the soles were of cork.



WITH A CHOKING, HEART-BROKEN SOB, IVY SANK UNCONSCIOUS AT THE FEET OF RONALD DUNDAS.

THE ROMANCE OF IVY MOSS.

—301—

CHAPTER VII.

REPENTANCE AT LEISURE.

LIFE, after all, is a sorry burthen; roses for some—a few; thorns for most; and disillusion, disenchantment, sooner or later, come to all alike.

Some such pessimistic reflection as this was passing, dimly and unspoken, through her tired brain, as a woman sat by the open window of an up-stairs sitting-room in a house which stood in the neighbourhood of Hornsey Rise, with the fields and woods of Highgate not far off.

It was evening.

Twilight was deepening into darkness. The sultry night promised to be even sultrier than the midsummer day had been.

In this third-rate suburban locality, albeit for London fairly healthy and open, where cheap villas and tawdry shops abounded, and where the near rumble of tram-car and omnibus seemed to make the windless air grow yet more unendurably close, the mere thought of the real sweet fresh green country at eventide came to one's longing soul like a dream of Paradise.

The furniture of that up-stairs sitting-room was shabby now; but once upon a time it had been light and pretty in its way; and indeed the mistress of the house, Mrs. Featherstone, still called the apartment her "drawing-room."

The woman by the window was not alone in the room.

Dozing upon the green rep sofa lay her little son, aged four years and some months; a delicate patient little soul, and the "image of his mother," people were wont to remark. The mother herself, however, could not discern the likeness. To her eyes the little boy was like his father; and sometimes, when her sad heart was unusually low and sore, she grieved bitterly that this should be so.

The drawing-room door opened quietly, and

the woman at the window looked round with a start. The landlady of the house had entered the room; but she halted in the dark near the doorway.

Mrs. Featherstone was the widow of a barrister, who should rightly have been something else. For he never made his way in the world, and died early broken-hearted. She, on the contrary, though thin and faded, was a gentle-natured, sweet-tempered soul, whom the ills of penury, its many hardships, had somehow failed wholly to warp or sour.

"What, still sitting all alone in the twilight, Mrs. Dundas!" said the barrister's widow. "Dear, dear, that is lonely work, is it not? Let me light the gas for you."

"Thank you—no!" answered Ivy Dundas, in a rapid undertone. "I prefer the half-light just now. Besides, dragging down the globes would make a noise, Mrs. Featherstone; and Derrick is asleep, I fancy."

"Sweet little fellow!" breathed Mrs. Featherstone, clasping her hands softly, and glancing affectionately towards the green rep sofa. "Is he better, do you think, this evening, madam?"

"I—I do not know. I hope so," the young mother replied.

"You ought to let a doctor see him," Mrs. Featherstone whispered—"you really ought to, Mrs. Dundas. I don't like to say it, for it seems cruel; but it really looks as if the little fellow were fading out of life. And Dr. Wrexham is a very nice man, and lives only just round the corner in the Cornwallis-road. His fee," ventured Mrs. Featherstone, as delicately as she could, "is three-and-sixpence; that is all. And I may tell you, Mrs. Dundas, that he did my Cynthia a lot of good when some time back she was laid up with a troublesome sore throat. Indeed, if it had not been for Dr. Wrexham's cleverness and care, I believe she would have lost her engagement at the Pagoda."

Ivy's hands were twisted fiercely together in her lap. She answered the landlady of the house with difficulty.

"You are very kind and thoughtful always, Mrs. Featherstone. When Mr. Dundas comes in I will tell him what you say."

"I am sure it would be wise," said the barrister's widow earnestly. "And shall I lay the supper-cloth for you now, Mrs. Dundas—my little maid is out?"

"No, do not trouble about it," answered Ivy wearily. "Should Mr. Dundas come in presently and want anything I will ring, Mrs. Featherstone. Is Miss Hyacinth Featherstone gone to the theatre yet?" she inquired, desirous to turn the talk from Ronald and little Derrick.

"Oh, yes, madam! Half-an-hour ago. Didn't you see her run out to catch the omnibus?" cried the mother of Miss Hyacinth Featherstone, proudly. Who would not be proud of so clever and fearless a daughter as Cynthia! "She sings at the theatre at 9.30 this evening, and has a new song called 'Never give in while the world goes round'; and if it proves the success that Mr. Lorraine thinks it will, why, next week Cynthia will have her name upon the bills in large red letters, instead of in small blue or black ones as has been the case up till now. And her salary will be raised, Mr. Lorraine says, which of course, madam, will be better than all."

"I suppose it will," sighed Ivy; and then she managed to dismiss Mrs. Featherstone, for she—Ivy Dundas—wished to be alone.

When Cynthia's mother began to talk about Cynthia there was no telling when she might stop.

Alone again, Ivy rose noiselessly from her chair and crept over to the shadowy sofa, to reassure herself that the little boy had not been disturbed by Mrs. Featherstone's entry.

No—the child had fallen into a sound sleep, was breathing regularly, the small pale face pillowed upon a tiny arm. Fearful of even kissing her darling's curls Ivy bent over the sofa-head and murmured passionately,—

"Heaven help and have pity on us both, my treasure, my own! What shall we do, dear; what shall we do!"

Then, in a kind of dumb despair, pressing her forehead downward into her hot palms, Ivy moved back slowly to her seat by the window; there to think, once more to try to think dispassionately what might be done for the best.

Alas, in grievous straits, "the best" is always so hard to discover.

It was a problem now worse than a nightmare; and with every day that came and went it seemed to grow more terrific.

To-night Ivy felt too weak to wrestle with the spectre—the future was her spectre. Try how she would, in her present state of mind, she could bring no concentrated thought to bear upon the torturing question. Weeks of weary brooding upon the inevitable, sleepless nights passed in contemplation of the chaos ahead, had she believed rendered her brain apathetic, when, for her own good and for the good of others, it should have been keen and alert.

And so her thoughts—as they so often did when she, in an utter heart-sickness which was nothing approaching resignation, sat down to wrestle with the riddle of her destiny—wandered, without volition, back to the days which were for ever dead.

She was not the first woman, she knew, nor would she be the last, who had made a grievous blunder upon the threshold of her womanhood.

As she sat there so still, and with bowed head, her little sick son sleeping upon the couch a few yards away, her girlhood as it were came back to her once more—every memory and detail of it.

Yes, she was a girl again—a girl, innocent, careless, and free—never dreaming that a day would dawn which would see her the wife of Ronald Dundas.

How well did she remember her life amid the dawns, and how far back in the unalterable past it all seemed now!—its health, its mystery, its simple joys; the glory of its lonely summer, the isolation of its still lonelier winter; her novels, her day-dreams among the gorse, her faithful terrier friend; and those two—the man and the woman—upon whom for so long and so trustfully she had looked on as her sole kith and kin!

And then—and then across her calm life-path had stepped Ronald Dundas, bringing with him love, agony, mistrust, terror, and a speedy eviscering of all that had hitherto bound her to an existence which, before his coming, had seemed enough.

Yes, until he came, she knew now that in her ignorance—which verily was bliss—she had been satisfied!

But with him and his headlong passion all was changed; and the wild freshness of life's morning had vanished for ever.

With knowledge, as in the first Eden days, had come pain; and the eyes that had been a stranger to weeping and its anguish had grown familiar with the bitterness of real tears!

How vividly could she recall her flight from Dell Cottage, the old grey flint house in a hollow of the downs—her lover's transient chivalry and wooing—their hurried marriage before the parish registrar at Bleakferry; their wondrous honeymoon abroad, the brief delirium of which joy-dream Ivy cared not now to remember any more; for the present was made up of sternest actualities, and such contrasts are not kind.

The first year of her married life had not been wholly unhappy; and at the close of it Ivy's child was born—their little son Roderick, which was a name, it seemed, in Ronald's own family; and night and morning now did Ivy thank Heaven on her knees that neither brother nor sister had followed little Derrick. Far better so!

No; that first year of Ivy's wedded life, which had been spent in Paris, where Ronald Dundas appeared to possess many friends, both men and women, had not proved wholly unhappy; though it had not taken Ivy a whole year to find out that in the dual nature of the man whom she had married there were two Ronald Dundases—the one who, in a secret and hasty wooing, had won her at Dell Cottage; the other, the husband and no longer a lover, who had already grown tired of her, and who made no feint of showing that this was the truth.

In those early days of their life together Ivy had, too, made other strange discoveries, which had at first filled her with acute dismay. But time, alas! helps one to grow used to anything and to everything—even a bad husband.

The man whom she had married was cursed with the vice which is the parent vice of all the rest.

He was lazy.

Being lazy, he was fond of pleasure, and constantly seeking it; frequently drank more than was good for him; and in his cups would swear at Ivy, his terrified wife, in language that before her marriage had never assailed her ears.

"I thought you were an artist—a water-colour painter, Ronald!" Ivy remarked to him one day, wonderingly, perhaps some six months after that hasty ceremony at Bleakferry.

"So I am, darling, and nothing else," he had told her airily.

"Why, then, do you never paint or sketch—now!"

"Oh, you do not understand! I am an amateur; and amateurs, Ivy, my dear, draw and work just when they please—that is, whenever inspiration is the motive power," was his careless reply, delivered with a yawn.

She ventured to ask him no more at the moment; but pondered, not without misgiving, the ways of amateur painters. They seemed, if Ronald himself were a true specimen of the brotherhood, to have plenty of money at their command. Where did it come from? she wondered every day, but feared to put the question into plain words. And Ronald Dundas was not the man to notice timid hints. He could be very deaf and very blind when he chose.

Ivy herself, even now, knew no more concerning him than she had known on her wedding-day.

His people were all dead, he told her carelessly; or he was dead to them, which amounted to the same thing. If anything at all, he was—as he had given out—a water-colour artist by profession; but he believed indeed that he was growing sick of that; though doubtless he would take up his sketching again when once he got back to England.

They had no fixed home, this young husband and wife—they were wanderers upon the face of the earth. A few months spent in one continental town, a few months passed in another, and so the years went by—Ronald making friends of a certain sort whithersoever they moved; Ivy seeking none.

From a shy, slender and quite unformed girl, she had grown into a quiet, reserved, not to say a proud woman—looking, by reason of the manner in which she carried herself, considerably taller than she really was.

She had her little son for companionship, for society, and that was all; for the men and the women whose company was sought by Ronald, and who seemed to find pleasure in his, were certainly not of a class of beings that possessed personal magnetism for Ivy.

She shunned and disliked them instinctively; yet could give perhaps no reason for her dislike. Derrick, the little boy, was all the world to her now.

Not infrequently would it happen that Ronald would fly into a passion with his young wife for declining to make a friend and an associate of "Countess This," or "Princess That," and the husbands of them, who were if possible more objectionable than the women themselves; and would tell Ivy that she was shy, unformed, stupid, and that her curious and isolated upbringing had made of her something worse than a nun.

Naturally taunts, disputes of this nature between them led to much misery in the way of downright quarrelling.

One night in Munich Ronald had been drinking with some American acquaintances of his in the town, who he said were "artists."

He came in and reproached Ivy for moping, for unsociability—evidently he was in a bickering and fault-finding humour—and for the fiftieth time he told her she was shy and stupid; enough in fact, to drive a man to the dogs.

There are limits to human forbearance; and un-

merited reproach—to say nothing of undeserved neglect—is at all times hard to endure patiently.

"If I was shy and stupid, Ronald," Ivy said bitterly, but so calmly as she could speak, "why—why did you marry me?"

"Ah, why indeed?" answered he, with a disagreeable sigh.

"And, having married me," Ivy continued with increasing warmth, "why do you not redeem your promise, Ronald? Before you made me your wife, you said—"

"If I had not been so confoundedly in love with you, I never should have made you my wife," grumbled he. "There was the mischief of it!"

"You said, you promised me faithfully—you cannot deny it Ronald—that—that you would do the utmost in your power to discover the facts of my parentage in the days—in those days before I was—before I was taken to—"

"Confusion seize that stale old grievance!" he exclaimed violently. "Am I never to hear the last of it! Ivy, if you were wise in the present, you would be content to let the past rest, and remain satisfied with—"

She checked the words on his lips.

"Ronald, once for all, I do not mean to let it rest. I am not satisfied. For my own sake, for Roderick's sake, I want to know the truth—nay, sooner or later, I will know the truth. You shall have no peace until I know it."

Then he faced her savagely.

"You force me to speak," he cried, "when Heaven knows, I don't want to hurt—to hurt—to hurt your feelings, Ivy."

Ivy was standing at the moment; but, turning suddenly faint, she sat down.

"My feelings, Ronald," she echoed bitterly. "Has it then only just occurred to you that I am not unlike other women, after all?"

"Oh, curse you, Ivy! You make a fellow's life a burthen with your everlasting whining and discontent. I say again, let the dead past alone—let sleeping dogs lie. Depend upon it, if I had honestly thought there was anything in the least respectable to find out concerning your antecedents I should have cleared up the business long ago. But you may take my word for it when I say that there isn't. I understand it—it's all plain enough—now. I married 'Ivy Moss' before the parish registrar at Bleakferry; and I did but marry my wife in her own name, in her real and lawful name; or what?—with a shrug—"was as good as such—that served as well. *Voula tout!*"

"Then you believe now," Ivy answered huskily, "that—that my grandfather—I—I mean, that the generous-hearted old man at Dell Cottage—was—in fact—"

"Exactly," interrupted Ronald, with a slight hiccough. "I believe that when years ago the old scamp brought you home to Dell Cottage, that lonely place of yours on the downs, he had simply, from some secret quarter or another, claimed his own; had seen fit to adopt and bring up—well, if you will have it—his own child."

"But the Bleakferry people used to say that I had been stolen, Ronald, or—or something of the kind," Ivy cried piteously. "Often in the old days you have told me so yourself. You know you have; and you must remember!" the young wife said despairingly.

"The Bleakferry people be—Pahaw!" broke off Ronald Dundas roughly, "how should the idiots know! Ivy, I want some whiskey-and-soda. Get it, please; look alive; and do, for Heaven's sake, cease this infernal chatter and snivelling about what can't be either helped or mended."

She took no notice of his request; but, white to the lips, she rose to her feet and moved over to the arm chair in which he lay at his ease, with his long straight legs stretched widely apart.

"I'll get you nothing—I'll never obey you in any one thing again—until you have told me the truth. I have been patient long enough, and to-night you shall speak out," said Ivy passionately. "If Daniel Moss was in truth my father, why then was his house unfit to be my home? Why should you frighten me and mystify me into quitting its roof with you? Why should there be—"

"I wanted you," said Ronald sullenly; "I was

idiotically in love with you. A man will do anything, dare anything, say or swear anything, to get for his own the woman he loves. You ought to know that by this time."

"What a man! And what a noble love!" said Ivy, with bitter scorn. He laughed disagreeably, with lowered eyelids. "Ronald," she cried then, "Ronald, I will know! Do you hear? You shall tell me! Who—what—is my grandfather—or father, as you say. Tell me, Ronald!"

With an oath Ronald Dundas sprang unsteadily from his chair; and gripping Ivy by the shoulders, he forced her downward upon her knees.

"So be it! I will!" he shouted, as she glanced upward at him with quailing frightened eyes. "The police know all about him, and so may you. He is—"

Speaking, Ronald Dundas bent low over his young wife, dropping his voice and hissing the words into her ear. Yet she heard them—heard them each one distinctly.

Shuddering, she looked back into her strange past, and saw it all once more as if by lurid lightning gleams; and she believed at the time that Ronald Dundas had spoken only the truth—that she had heard the grim truth at last!

No, she never then for an instant doubted that she was the child, the offspring, of Daniel Moss! Heaven help her!

Ivy was not very vigorous in those days; on that night she was really faint and ill.

The revelation—the lifting of the veil—was too much.

With merely a gasp for breath, a choking heart-broken sob, Ivy sank unconscious at the feet of Ronald Dundas.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DREPPING SHADOWS.

For several days afterwards Ivy had kept to her bed; stricken down with a kind of low fever combined with intense melancholy; but time, and youth, one knows, are marvellous physicians; and by-and-by she rallied and grew strong again. Nevertheless, had it not been for her boy—her little dark-haired Roderick—Ivy, so she thought sometimes, would have prayed that she might die and be at rest for ever.

"Convict—housebreaker—thief. Perhaps murderer!" The words, night and day, beat themselves into her brain, and were never absent from her shuddering memory.

But after that never-to-be-forgotten night in Munich, the past, the fateful past in which they too had met, was never again mentioned between Ronald Dundas and his wife. For herself, Ivy could only ponder it with horror unspeakable; though oftentimes the old life would come back to her in her dreams.

And her mother, her own mother, what of her! Ivy wondered sometimes. It was a terrible question, always! Was she living or was she dead?

And if living—where?

Did Daniel Moss himself know? Perhaps yes, perhaps no. And so—and so it was because of her birth, because of the shame and the disgrace of it all, that he had in her earliest years taught her to call him "grandfather." The stain upon her life, he fancied, could be hidden thus—yes, hidden, but never rubbed out!

No wonder, then, the old man had been so good to her always; so kind, so generous, and so tender! No wonder she had cared for him in return, and the old witch-faced woman whom she had been taught to call "grandmother" seemed never to care for her at all!

So did Ivy reason secretly, in those weary, heart-breaking days.

When little Derrick's fourth birthday had gone by it became plain to Ivy, horribly plain, that money was growing scarce in their small family circle.

Ronald's means, whatever their source, were evidently on the brink of exhaustion. His luck at the foreign gaming-tables—and for some time

past he had played a good deal—seemed lately to have forsaken him wholly.

His sketches and water-colour drawings somehow appeared to be of no value abroad; no one, in fact, seemed to care about or to understand the very English-looking pictures that Mr. Dundas drew and painted.

With each passing day he grew more morose and black-browed; and when things "went wry," and loomed in the future at hand more hopeless than ever, he drank his whiskey-and-soda and swore frightfully, scaring poor little Derrick nearly out of his wits.

Left, as she had been, so much to herself, Ivy had turned her leisure and her loneliness to good account. Naturally fond of books, and keenly alive to the pleasure and profit to be found in their silent companionship, she had by patient study acquired during the past few years a thorough mastery over the French and German tongues.

For study, indeed, for hard mental work of any kind, Ivy discovered that she had a genuine aptitude. The acquiring of languages came easy to her. Music, also, had not been neglected. Thus a defective education was fast being remedied.

In their more prosperous days, whilst sojourning in Dresden, Ronald had consented to his young wife's studying under the first-rate tuition of the famous Herr Stüssi; and afterwards, with other clever masters elsewhere, Ivy had accomplished wonders. Her talent and progress indeed had astonished no one more than herself.

It had proved that the youthful Mrs. Dundas was gifted with a strong and beautiful voice, deficient in no quality—powerful in its passion, sweet in its pathos; and patient hard-work and right cultivation had brought with them an ample reward.

Yes, in the old dead and vanished days Ivy had been a shy, light-hearted, ignorant girl; but with hard schooling in a hard world she had become a woman of many accomplishments; reserved unquestionably, yet capable of intense feeling; suffering much perhaps where others would suffer not at all.

When Ivy discovered that financial matters were desperate—realised that something must be done at once to remedy them—they were in Brussels, having lately arrived from Homburg.

"Properly managed, the journey would not cost us so much, Ronald," she suggested gently. "Let us pack up and go to England."

"And what pray to do when we get there?" said he, with a frown.

"I am certain I could very well teach French and music," she told him—"German and other things besides. And you—you of course could soon sell your paintings and sketches in London, Ronald."

Again he said something in a growling undertone; something to the effect that he was not, if he knew it, going to have his wife trudging about the London streets as a slave of a daily government.

A queer little smile first flitted over the lips of Ivy; although it was nothing new to her to hear Ronald Dundas take this lofty tone and humour, when Ivy knew all the while that he cared not a straw in so far as his wife's dignity or inclination might be concerned.

After much gloom and grumbling generally on the husband's part, the young wife's suggestion was ultimately acted upon.

They came to London towards the end of May, and found a cheap lodging in the neighbourhood of Vauxhall; but it early became evident to Ivy's eyes that the little boy, delicate from his birth, was sickening and growing frailer in that low-lying locality near the river; and consequently she had urged Ronald to quit Vauxhall and to move northward, where the air would be lighter and purer for them all.

After some difficulty another lodging was found in the vicinity of Hornsey Rise—"Minerva Crescent" the place was called—in the house of Mrs. Featherstone and her daughter Hyacinth; and then Ronald refused emphatically to move an inch farther out of town.

From the end of the Cornwallis-road, said he,

they could, by the aid of tram-car and omnibus, in a very short while get to Hampstead or Highgate; and surely those places were high and airy enough for anybody.

Could Ivy have had her will in the matter she would have removed outright to some outlying breezy suburb—this alone for the child's sake; for it seemed to the anxious young mother that Hornsey Rise was in reality but a poor improvement upon the Vauxhall neighbourhood.

Certainly Derrick at present looked little better for the change.

They had now been living for some three weeks in the house of Mrs. Featherstone. Two weeks' rent had been paid—Ivy scarcely knew how; one was owing.

What valuables in the way of trinkets she had possessed had been parted with quietly before they left the Vauxhall lodging.

Few as they were—these trinkets—Ronald, Ivy well knew, had missed them; they were his own gifts to her; she had no others. But he made no comment, all the same.

Ivy sold her gold chain one day for three pounds; on the following day Ronald had come to her and had "borrowed" thirty shillings of his wife.

At the present time she had not a penny in the world to call her own—it was the bare truth; and the little sick Derrick was in need of many a luxury that it was utterly out of Ivy's power to obtain for him.

So far Ivy had made no attempt whatever to find pupils or employment of any sort; for she could not endure the thought of the child's being left at any time to the casual care and mercy of strangers—though no two female hearts could well be more innately kind than were the hearts of Mrs. Featherstone and her daughter Hyacinth, the latter having taken to the variety stage, and being employed at the Moorish Pagoda.

Nevertheless, soft-hearted as suburban landladies may prove occasionally, they do not like to be kept waiting unduly for money honestly their own.

And how, wondered Ivy, as she sat there in the summer night gloom by the open drawing-room window—her head still bowed on her locked hands, her heart sick with despair—how was Mrs. Featherstone to be paid that week; and not only that week, but the next, and the week following!

How was Dr. Wrexham in the Cornwallis-road to be called in to prescribe for Derrick when doctors want their fees, no matter how reasonable those fees may be! Doctors, moreover, are chary of trusting strangers in furnished apartments—they, like other folk in this world, must look after their own.

"What was to be done! What was to be done for the best?"

Ivy's painful reverie was so deep and so absorbing that she failed to hear a latch-key grate in the lock of the front-door; then a quick step upon the stairs; the sitting-room door open again—but not this time to admit Mrs. Featherstone.

A hand was dropped heavily upon Ivy's shoulder; and with wild dazed eyes she looked up.

"Why the deuce are you sitting in the dark, Ivy?" exclaimed her husband boisterously—"are you asleep!"

In an instant she was thoroughly awake.

"No, Ronald—though dreaming, perhaps, with my eyes open," she answered, unconscious of the bitter weariness in her voice.

"Well, look here—Why on earth did not that old fool below light the gas for you? 'Tis a lot past ten," he broke off, proceeding noisily to draw down the chandelier and to search for a box of matches that he carried in his waistcoat pocket.

"I asked Mrs. Featherstone not to do so," Ivy replied. "And please, Ronald, make less noise if you can. Derrick has fallen asleep on the sofa. He is very poorly this evening."

Mr. Dundas struck a match, and set the gas flaring extravagantly. Ivy perceived then that he had been drinking; though in a manner he was now sober.

"Nonsense, Ivy. You are full of fancies

always about that child. He is naturally a bit delicate—always was. With all your coddling you only make him worse. He ought to have been in bed hours ago."

"You seem to have been gone nearly all day," said Ivy, quietly. "Have you nothing to tell me? But perhaps you want some supper, Ronald?" she added dutifully; though aware that their larder just then was furnished scantily enough.

"All right. Presently. Look you here, Ivy—things are looking up—I was in luck's way to-day, for a wonder. Down in the Strand this afternoon, among those blessed dealers and their frame-shops, I ran against an old chum and school-fellow—sort of cousin or connection o' mine, I suppose he is—and he lent me twenty pounds."

"Ronald! Lent you?"

"Yes," returned he roughly. "Why not, pray? Have you any objection?"

A burning flush spread and tingled in the cheeks of Ivy.

It was a flush partly of shame. For she was very certain that this friend, cousin, or school-fellow of Ronald's, whoever or whatever he was, would never again see his twenty pounds.

And yet, at the same time, sudden joy had filled her heart. She went to her husband's side quickly, and laid her hand upon his arm.

"Ronald," she said, "give me a sovereign or two of it!"

"What for, my dear?" laughed he, with a hic-cough.

"I—I want to see Dr. Wrexham about Derrick," she answered earnestly.

"Oh, hang it all, Ivy, if you are going to begin physicking the youngster with doctor's stuff you'll about do for him altogether—you see if you don't," remarked Ronald Dundas, carelessly, moving somewhat unsteadily over to the bell-cord and pulling it sharply. "By-the-bye, I asked Keith Falconer to look in one day, if he didn't mind coming out to such a beastly hole as this. And he said he would."

"Is Mr. Keith Falconer the old friend and school-fellow whom you met to-day, Ronald?" Ivy inquired, calmly.

She resolved then and there that, should this Keith Falconer ever really take the trouble to find his way out to Minerva-crescent, she would thank him, let it cost her what it might, for his generous and timely "loan."

"Yes, he is. And if—and if," went on Ronald, "you do positively want the money, why, here are five sovereigns for you, Ivy, and that will have to do for a time. The barrister's widow downstairs must be paid, I suppose."

Ivy caught up the five gold pieces eagerly, murmuring the while her feverish thanks, just as the child upon the sofa stirred uneasily, moaning a little, and then said plaintively,—

"Mother—mother, are you here?"

In a moment Ivy was by the child's side; kneeling upon the floor by the couch, and caressing the little dark head.

"Derrick, I am here, my darling. And are you better, my pet?"

"I am very tired, mother, and so thirsty."

"Are you, Derrick? And what would you like, dear?"

"Some ginger-beer, mother."

"You shall have it directly; the moment mother can get it, darling."

"Tired! Lemonade!—no, ginger-beer, wasn't it?" cried Ronald, laughing loudly. "Upon my word, you are a nice young chap, after going to sleep the whole evening long, to wake up tired and cry out for ginger-beer! Bless my stars alive, what next, I wonder!"

"Father, is that you? And are you come home, then?" said Derrick listlessly. He was always listless now; the weather was so warm; and nothing apparently either astonished or interested him.

"So it seems, my little son Roderick," said his father boisterously—"doesn't it?"

"Yes, father," answered the little boy placidly, in his old-fashioned and unchildlike way.

And then the small handmaiden downstairs, having heard the drawing-room bell, entered, bearing a supper-tray with everything at once

collected upon it that there was to bring upstairs to Mrs. Featherstone's lodgers.

But Ivy, kneeling there by the sofa, scarcely knew that the girl was in the room.

She was anxious, broken-hearted, full of unuttered fears. Ah, could it actually be that she was indeed the Ivy Moss of the old Doll Cottage days?

Had she ever in reality known a carefree and happy maidenhood in the dim years which were gone?

It might be so—yes!

But to herself, Ivy Dundas, the woman now, tried in the furnace of sorrow and experience, the transformation seemed impossible.

(To be continued.)

A SISTER'S REVENGE.

—101—

CHAPTER V.

"I SAY you shall not!" cried Ann, planting herself firmly before her. "You shall not leave this house to-night!"

"You have no right to keep me here!" panted Madge. "I am—I am—"

The words died away on her lips. Duncan had told her that she must not tell just yet.

"You are a rash little fool," cried Ann wrathfully. "You are the bane of my life, and have been ever since that stormy winter night George brought you here. I told him then to wash his hands of the whole matter; you would grow up a wilful, impetuous mix, and turn out at last like your mother."

Madge sprang to her feet like lightning, her velvet eyes blazing, her breath coming quick and hot.

"Speak of me as lightly as you will, Aunt Ann," she cried, "but you must spare my poor mother's name. Oh, mother, mother," she cried flinging herself down on her knees and sobbing piteously, "if you had only taken me with you down into the dark, cruel waters!"

"I only wish to Heaven she had," fervently ejaculated Anne.

At that moment a quick, hurried step sounded on the gravel path without, and George Meadows hastily entered the room.

"Ah! Thank Heaven, here you are, Madge! I was over at the Hall for you, and they told me you had left some hours ago. I knew you were not home, and I was sorely afraid something had happened to you."

Ah! how little he knew! Something had happened to her—the darkest and cruellest shadow that had ever darkened a girl's life was slowly gathering above her innocent head, and was soon to break, carrying in its turbulent depths a sorrow more bitter than death to bear.

George Meadows glanced inquiringly from one to the other, intuitively guessing he must have interrupted a scene.

Madge had struggled up from her knees to a sitting posture, putting her hair, curled into a thousand shining rings, away from her flushed face.

"Have you been scolding Madge again, Ann?" he asked angrily, taking the panting little dame from the floor, and seating her upon his knee; then he drew the curly head down to his rough-clad shoulder and held it there with his toil-hardened hand. "What have you been saying to my little Madge, that I find her in tears?"

"I was telling her that if she did not mend her wilful ways she might turn out like her mother—"

"Hush!" exclaimed George Meadows, excitedly. "I wouldn't have thought that you would say that. What does Madge know of such things?" he muttered indignantly. "Don't let your senses run away with you, Ann!"

"Don't let your senses run away with you, George Meadows. Haven't you the sense to know that Madge is getting too big for you to

take on your knee and pet in that fashion. I am really ashamed of you! Madge is almost a woman," snapped Ann scornfully—"quite sixteen."

George Meadows looked at his sister in amazement, then held little Madge off, and gazed into the sweet, blooming face, and stroked the long, fluffy golden curls as he replied,—

"Ah, no, Anne; Madge is only a child. Why, it seems as though it were but yesterday I used to take her with me through the fields, and laugh to see her stretch up her chubby hands, crying for the bursting blossoms growing high above her curly golden head. Pahaw, Ann! Madge is yet only a merry, frolicsome, romantic child."

Madge nestled her tall-tale face closer to his broad shoulder to hide the swift blushes that crept up to cheek and brow.

"Look up, pet," he said coaxingly. "I have news for you."

"What—what is it?" gasped Madge, turning white to the very lips, her blue eyes darkening with suspense, and wondering if he could possibly have heard of her romantic marriage with Duncan.

"Come, come, now," laughed George, good-humouredly; "don't get excited, pet; it will take me just as long to tell it anyhow. It is something that will please you immensely."

As he spoke he drew from his breast-pocket a thick yellow envelope which contained several printed forms with blank spaces which were to be filled up.

There was something in his manner which made Madge look at him; but her eyes fell and her cheeks flushed hotly as she met his glance.

Madge was not used to keeping a secret locked up in her truthful little heart. She longed to throw her arms around his neck and whisper to him of her mad romantic marriage, and of the handsome young husband who loved her so fondly.

She knew but little of real life, and less of love and marriage, up to the time she had met Duncan.

Her heroes had been imaginary ones, her ideas of love only girlish, romantic fancies.

It was all very exciting and charming. She was very fond of handsome Duncan, but she had yet to learn the depths of love which, sooner or later, brightens the lives of lovable women.

Madge looked at the envelope with a wistful glance.

"I am going to make a lady of you, my little sunbeam. I am going to send you off to boarding-school. That's what you have always wanted; now I am going to humour your whim."

"But I—I do not want to go now, Uncle George. I—I have changed my mind."

"What!"

"I—I don't want to go off to boarding-school now. I had rather stay here with you."

George Meadows laid down his pipe in genuine surprise.

"Why, it's only last week you were crying those pretty eyes of yours out, teasing to be sent to school. I—well, confound it! I—I don't understand the ways of women. I always thought you were different from the rest, little Madge, but I see you are all the same—never two days of the same mind. What is the reason you've changed your mind, pet?"

"Indeed I don't want to go now, Uncle George. Please don't talk about it any more. I—I am happier here than I can tell you."

George Meadows laughed cheerily.

"It's too late for you to change your mind now, little one. I have made arrangements for you to start early to-morrow morn'g, so you had better start off to bed at once, or there will be no roses in these cheeks to-morrow."

He never forgot the expression of the white, startled face she raised to his. For once in her life Madge was unable to shake him from his purpose.

"I know best, little one," he said. "I mean to make a lady of you. You have no fortune, little Madge, but your pretty face. It will be hard to lose my little girl, but it is my duty, Madge. It is too late to back out now; for once

I am firm. You must start to-morrow morning."

"Oh, dear, oh, dear!" sobbed Madge, throwing herself down on her little white bed when she had reached her own room, "what shall I do! I can't go without seeing Duncan. I never heard of a girl that was married being sent off to school. I—I dare not tell Uncle George I am his wife. Oh, if I could only see Duncan!" Madge sprang out of bed and crossed over to the little white curtained window, and gazed out into the still calm beauty of the night. "If I only knew where to find Duncan," she mused, "I would go to him now. Surely he would not let me be sent away from him." She turned away from the window with a sigh. "I must see Duncan to-morrow morning," she said, determinedly.

And the weary golden head, tired out with the day which had just died out, sunk restfully down upon the snowy pillow in a dreamless sleep, the happiest, alas! that poor little girl-bride was to know for long and weary years.

A dark, dreamy silence wraps the cottage in its soft embrace, the moon, clear and full, sails tranquilly through the star-sown heavens, and the sweet scent of distant orange groves is wafted through the midnight breeze.

Yet the dark-cloaked figure that walks quickly and softly up the gravelled path sees none of the soft, calm beauty of the still summer night. She raises the brass knocker with a quick, imperative touch.

After a wait of perhaps ten minutes or so Ann answers the summons, but the candle she holds nearly drops from her hands as she beholds the face of her midnight visitor in the dim, uncertain flickering glare of the candle-light.

"Miss Lena," she exclaims, in amazement, "is there any one ill at the Hall?"

"No," replied Lena, in a soft, low, guarded whisper. "I wished to see you—my business is most important; may I come in?"

"Certainly," answered Ann, awkwardly. "I beg your pardon, miss, for keeping you standing outside so long."

As Lena took the seat Ann placed for her the dark cloak she wore fell from her shoulders, and revealed her in shimmering silk.

Rabies glowed like restless, leaping fire upon her perfect arms and snowy throat, and sprays of hyacinths were twined in her dark, glossy hair; but they were quite faded now, drooping, crushed, and limp among her curls; there was a strange, dead-white pallor on her haughty face, and a lurid gleam shone in her dark, sinuous eyes.

Lena had studied well the character of the woman before her—who made no secret of her dislike for the child thrust upon their bounty—and readily imagined she would willingly aid her in carrying out the scheme she had planned.

Slowly one by one the stars died out of the sky; the pale moon drifted silently behind the heavy rolling clouds; the winds tossed the tops of the tall trees to and fro, and the dense darkness which precedes the breaking of the grey dawn settled over the earth.

The horses which the groom had held for long hours pawed the ground restlessly; the man himself was growing impatient.

"She can be up to no good," he muttered; "all honest people should be in their beds."

The door of the cottage opened, and Lena Stanton walked slowly down the path.

"All is fair in love's warfare," she mutters, triumphantly. "Fool! with your baby face and golden hair, you shall walk quickly into the net I have spread for you; he shall despise you."

CHAPTER VI.

UNDER the oak tree Duncan Field paced uneasily to and fro, wondering what could have happened to detain Madge. He was very nervous, feverish, and impatient, as he watched the sun rising higher and higher in the blue heavens, and glanced at his watch for the fifth time in a few minutes.

"Pshaw!" he muttered, whisking off the tops

of the buttercups near him with his ebony walking-stick. "I am not myself at all. I am growing as nervous as a woman. I think I'll read little sister Marion's letter over again to occupy my mind until my sweet little Madge comes."

He sighed and smiled in one breath, as he threw himself down at full length on the green grass under the trees. Taking from his pocket a little square white envelope, addressed in a childish hand to "Duncan Field, Esq.," Duncan laughed aloud, until the tears started to his eyes, as they fell on the words "*Care of Miss Lena*," heavily underlined in the lower corner.

"That is just like dear, careless little Mollie," he mused. "She supposes, because she knows who Miss Lena is, every one else must certainly be aware of the same fact."

He spread out the letter on his knee, trying hard to while away the time in perusing its pages.

Duncan looked so fresh and cool and handsome in his white flannels, lying there under the shady trees that summer morning, his dark curls resting on his white hand, and a smile lighting up his pleasant face, it is not to be wondered at that he was just the kind of young fellow to win the love of young romantic girls like innocent Madge, and Lena, the haughty young heiress.

Slowly Duncan read the letter through to the end. A vehicle whirled rapidly past him on its way to meet the early train. Yet, all unconscious that it bore away from him his treasure, he never once glanced up from the letter he was reading.

Again Duncan laughed aloud as he glanced it over, and read as follows:—

"DEAR BROTHER DUNCAN,—

"We received the letter you wrote, and the picture you sent with it, and my heart has been so heavy ever since that I could not write to you because big tears would fall on the page and blot it."

"Now, dear old brother, don't be angry at what your little Mollie is going to say. Mamma says you are going to marry and bring home a wife, and she showed me her picture, and said you were very much in love with her, and I must be so too. But I can't fall in love with her, Duncan; indeed, I've tried very hard, and I can't. Don't tell anybody, but I'm awfully afraid I shan't like her one bit. She looks stylish, and her name, Lena, sounds stylish too, but she doesn't look kind. I thought, perhaps, if I told you I did not like her you might give her up and come home. I forgot to tell you the blue-room and the room across the hall are being fitted up for you just lovely, and I am to have your old one."

"P.S.—And we received a letter from Mr. Vincent Dalrymple, too. He says he will be passing through here soon, and wishes to call. When are you coming home, Duncan? Don't bring any one with you."

"Your loving little sister,

"MOLLIE."

"There's no fear of my bringing Lena home now," he laughed, whisking a bar or two from an operative tune. "Mollie won't have anything to fear on that score. I do wish mother hadn't set her heart on my marrying Lena. Parents make a mistake in choosing whom their children shall marry and whom they shall not. Love goes where it is sent."

He looked at his watch again.

"By George!" he muttered, turning very pale upon seeing another hour had slipped away, "I cannot stand this a minute longer. I must see what has happened to Madge."

With a nameless fear clutching at his heart—a dark, shadowy fear—like the premonition of coming evil, Duncan made his way rapidly through the tangled underbush, cutting across lots to George Meadows's cottage.

He had determined to call for Madge upon some pretext. It was rather a bold undertaking, and might cause comment; still, he was reckless of all consequences: he must see Madge at all hazards; and when Duncan made up his mind to do anything he usually succeeded; he was as

daring and courageous as he was reckless and handsome.

Once, twice, thrice he knocked, receiving no answer to his summons.

"That's strange," he mused—"exceedingly strange!"

Hardly knowing what prompted him to do it Duncan turned the knob. It yielded to the touch, swinging slowly back on its creaking hinges.

"Good Heavens!" he ejaculated, gazing wildly about him, and as pale as death; "Madge is gone, and the cottage is empty!"

He leaned against the doorway, putting his hand to his brow, like one who had received a heavy blow, and the bare walls seemed to take up the cry and echo mockingly, "Gone!"

The blow was so sudden and unexpected he was completely bewildered; his brain was in a whirl.

He saw a labourer crossing the fields, and called to him.

"I was looking for George Meadows," said Duncan. "I find the cottage empty. Can you tell me where they have gone?"

"Gone!" echoed the man, surprisedly. "I don't understand it. I was passing the door a few hours since, just as a cab drove off with George Meadows and Madge. 'Good-bye, neighbour,' he called out to me; 'I am off on an extended business trip. You must bring your wife over often to see Ann, she will be lonely, I'll warrant.' There was no sign of moving then. I—I don't understand it."

"You say he took Madge with him?" asked Duncan, with painful eagerness. "Can you tell me where they went?"

The man shook his head and passed on.

Duncan was more mystified than ever.

"What can it all mean?" he asked himself.

"Surely," he cried, "Madge—dear little, innocent, blue-eyed Madge—could not have meant to deceive me. Yet, why has she not told me?"

The hot blood mounted to his temples. Perhaps Madge regretted having married him, and had fled from him. The thought was so bitter it almost took his breath away.

Duncan loved her so madly, so passionately, so blindly, he vowed to himself he would search heaven and earth to find her. And in that terrible hour the young husband tasted the first draught of the cup of bitterness which he was to drain to the very dregs.

Poor Duncan! he little knew this was but the first stroke of Lena Stanton's fatal revenge—to remove her rival from her path, that she might win him back to his old allegiance.

Early that morning there had been great bustle and stir in the Meadows's cottage. In vain Madge had attempted to steal quietly away into her own little room, and write a hasty line to Duncan, which, if all other means failed her, she could send to him by one of the men employed in the fields, begging him to come to her at once.

Ann would not leave her to herself for a single instant. Even her writing-desk, which had stood on the bureau in the corner for years, was gone. Poor little Madge cried out to herself that fate was against her.

"I should like to say good-bye to the old familiar scenes, Ann," she said, making a desperate effort to meet Duncan by some means. "I should like to see the old oak tree down in the glade just once before I go."

"Nonsense!" replied Ann sharply, a malicious smile hovering about the corners of her mouth. "I guess the trees and the flowers won't wither and die of grief if you don't bid them good-bye. It's too late now, anyhow. See, here is the cab coming already," she cried, glancing out of the window; "and here comes George with his valise and umbrella. Make haste, Madge. Where's your gloves and hat?"

For one brief instant Madge stood irresolute. If she had only dared cry out to them,—

"I am a bride—it is cruel to send me away from Duncan!" what a world of misery might have been spared her!

But her lips were sealed.

"Well, well!" cried George Meadows hurriedly entering the room. "Not ready yet, little

girls! We must be off at once or we will miss the train."

In vain Madge protested brokenly she could not go, and the agony in those uplifted blue eyes would have touched a heart of stone.

Still, George Meadows believed it would be a sin to comply with her request. Go to school she must, for Heaven had intended a cultured mind should accompany so beautiful a face.

Half carrying the slight figure in his powerful arms, Madge was borne, half fainting, and sobbing as though her heart would break, to the vehicle which stood in waiting.

On through the fragrant stillness of that sunshiny summer morning the jolting cab rolled rapidly on its way, crossing the little bridge where she had lingered only the night before with Duncan, her husband.

They would soon reach the alder bushes that skirted the pool. The next bend in the road would bring her in sight of the tree where Duncan would be awaiting her.

Ah! thank Heaven, it was not too late! She could fling out her arms and cry out—

"Duncan, my love! my darling! they are hearing me from you! Save me, Duncan, my darling, save me."

George Meadows sat quietly by her side, wondering what had come over little Madge—sweet impulsive little Madge—in a single night.

"She is only a child," he muttered to himself, "full of whims and caprices—crying her eyes out last week because she could not go off to school, and now crying because she's got to go."

Swiftly the cab rolled down the green, sloping hill-side.

In another moment it had reached the alder bushes and gained the curve of the road, and she saw Duncan lying on the green grass waiting for her.

The sunlight, drifting through the blossoms, fell upon his handsome, upturned, smiling face, and the dark curls pushed back from his white forehead.

"Duncan! Duncan!" she cried, wringing her hands; but the words died away on her white lips, making no sound.

Then the world seemed to close darkly around her, and poor little Madge, the unhappy girl-bride, fell back in the coach in a deadly swoon.

CHAPTER VII.

"Poor little Madge!" cried George Meadows, wiping away a suspicious moisture from his eyes with his rough, toil-hardened hand, "she takes it pretty hard now; but the time will come when she will thank me for it. Heaven knows there's nothing in this world more valuable than an education; and she will need it, poor, motherless child!"

As the stage drove up before the station Madge opened her blue eyes with a sigh.

"I can at least write to Duncan at once," she thought, "and explain the whole matter to him."

Madge smiled as she thought Duncan would be sure to follow on the very next train.

George watched the smile and the flush of the rosy face, and believed Madge was beginning to feel more reconciled about going to school.

"I hope we will get there by noon," said George, anxiously, taking the seat beside her on the crowded train. "If we missed the train at the cross-roads it would be serious. I should be obliged to send you on alone; for I must get to town by night, as I have some very important business to transact for the plantation which must be attended to at once."

"Alone!" echoed Madge, tremblingly. "Why, Uncle George, I was never away from home alone in my life!"

"That's just the difficulty," he answered, perplexedly. "I have always guarded my little maid from the world's cruel blasts, and you are unused to the rough side of life."

"Still I could go on alone," persisted Madge, bravely.

George Meadows laughed outright.

"You would get lost at the first corner, my girl! Then I should have to fly around to the newspaper office, advertising for a little country girl who was either lost, strayed, or stolen. No, no, little one!" he cried; "I would not trust you alone, a stranger in a great city. A thousand ills might befall a young girl with a face like yours."

"No one would know I was a stranger," replied Madge, innocently. "I should simply inquire the way to Madame Christine's, and follow the directions given me."

"There! didn't I tell you you could never find the way!" laughed George until he was red in the face. "You suppose a city is like our country lanes, where you tell a stranger, 'Follow that path until you come to a sign-post, then that will tell you which road leads to the village.' Ha! ha! ha! Why, my dear little Star, not one person in a hundred whom you might meet ever heard of Madame Christine! In cities people don't know their very neighbours personally. They are sure to find out if there's any scandal about, and that is all they know about them. You would have a lively time finding Madame Christine's without your old Uncle George to pilot you."

Madge's last hope was nipped in the bud. She had told herself if she were left alone she could send a telegram back at once to Duncan, and he would join her, and she would not have to go to school—school, which would separate a girl-bride from the handsome young husband of whom she was fast learning to be so fond.

"I could have sent you under the care of Mr. Dalrymple," continued George, thoughtfully. "He started for the city yesterday; but I did not receive Madame Christine's letter in time."

He did not notice, as he spoke, that the occupant of the seat directly in front of them gave a perceptible start, and drew the broad slouch hat he wore still further over his face, while a cruel smile lingered for a moment about his handsome mouth.

The stranger appeared deeply interested in the columns of the paper he held; but in reality he was listening attentively to the conversation going on behind him.

"I shall not lose sight of this pretty little girl," said Vincent Dalrymple to himself, for it was he. "No power on earth shall save her from me! I shall win her from him by fair means or foul. It will be a glorious revenge!"

"Madame Christine's seminary is a very high-toned institution," continued George, reflectively; "and the young girls I saw there wore no end of ribbons and furbelows; but I'll warrant for fresh sweet beauty you'll come out ahead of all of 'em."

"You think too much of me, dear, good old uncle," cried Madge, gratefully. "I—I wonder if any one in the world could ever care for me as—you do!" whispered Madge, laying her soft, warm cheek against his rough hand.

"No one but a husband," he responded, promptly. "But you are too young to have such notions in your head yet awhile. Attend to your books, and don't think of beaux."

"Now that we are on the subject, I may as well speak out what I've had on my mind for some time. I don't want my little Madge to fall in love with any strangers she may happen to meet. You are too young to know anything about love affairs. You'll never rightly understand it until it comes to you. I must know all about the man who wants my little Madge."

"Whatever you do, little one, do well and honestly. And, above all, never deceive me. I have often heard of these romantic young school-girls falling in love with handsome strangers, and clandestine meetings following, which ended in elopements; but mark my words, no good comes of these deceptions. Forewarned is forearmed. Madge, you will always remember my words, and say to yourself: 'He knows what is best.' You will remember what I say, won't you, dear?"

He wondered why the fair, sweet face grew so pale as a snow-drop, why the cold little fingers trembled in his clasp, and the velvety eyes drooped beneath his earnest gaze.

"Yes," whispered Madge, "I shall remember what you have said."

In spite of her efforts to speak naturally and calmly the sweet voice would tremble.

"Change," cried a porter, "for the North and West!"

"Ah, here we are," cried George, hastily gathering up their satchels and bundles. "We must make haste to reach the train, to get a seat."

Madame Christine's Seminary for Young Ladies was a magnificent structure, situated in the suburbs. On either side of the pebbled walk which led to the main entrance were tall fountains tossing their rainbow-tinted sprays up to the sky.

The lawn in front was closely mowed.

The reputation of this institution was second to none. Young ladies were justly proud of being able to say they finished their education at Madame Christine's establishment.

As a natural consequence, the school was composed of select young ladies.

Clang! clang! clang! sounded the great bell from the belfry as Madge, with a sinking, homesick feeling stealing over her, walked slowly up the paved walk, by George Meadows' side toward the imposing, aristocratic structure.

Poor little Madge never forgot her first day at the boarding-school—how all the dainty young girls in their soft white muslins glared in surprise at her when Madame Christine brought her into the school-room; but she could have forgiven them that if they had not laughed at her poor old uncle George, in his plain country garb, and giggled behind their handkerchiefs when she clung to his neck and could not say good-bye owing to her tears, but sunk down into her seat, leaving her head on her desk, and bravely trying to keep back the pearly tears that would fall.

When recess came Madge did not leave her seat. She would have given the world to have heard Duncan's voice just then; she was beginning to realise how much his sheltering love was to her. She would even have been heartily glad to have been back in the little kitchen at the cottage, no matter how much Aunt Ann scolded her.

All the girls here had the same haughty way of tossing their heads and curling their lips and looking innumerable things out of their eyes. They reminded Madge very strongly of Lena Stanton.

Most of the girls had left the school-room, going in groups and pairs here and there.

Madge sat watching them, feeling wretchedly lonely. Suddenly a soft white hand was laid lightly on her shoulder, and a sweet voice said,—

"We have a recess of fifteen minutes; won't you come out into the grounds with me? I should be so pleased to have you come."

The voice was so gentle, so coaxing, so sweet, Madge involuntarily glanced up at the young girl bending over her as she arose to accompany her. She put her arm around Madge's waist, school-girl fashion, as they walked down the long hall and out on the green grassy lawn.

"My name is Ruth Graham," she said; "will you tell me yours?"

"My uncle calls me Madge Meadows," she answered.

"What a pretty name!" cried her new-found friend, enthusiastically; "and how well it suits you. Why, it is a little poem in itself."

Madge flushed as rosy as the crimson geraniums near them, remembering Duncan, her own handsome Duncan, had said the same thing that morning he had carried her heavy basket to the gates of the Hall—that morning when all the world seemed to change as she glanced up into his merry brown eyes.

"We are to be room-mates," explained Ruth, "and I know I shall like you ever so much. Do you think you will like me?"

"Yes," said Madge. "I like you now."

"Thank you," said Miss Ruth, making a mock courtesy. "I am going to love you with all my might, and if you don't love me you will be the most ungrateful creature in the world. I know just how loathsome you must be," continued Ruth. "I remember just how loathsome I was the first day I was away from mamma, and when

night set in, and I was all alone, and I knew I was securely locked in, I was actually thinking of tearing the sheets of my bed into strips and making a rope of them, and letting myself down to the ground through the window, and making for home as fast as I could, I knew I would be brought back the next day, though," laughed Ruth. "Mamma is so strict with me. I suppose yours is too!"

"I have no mother or father," answered Madge. "All my life I have lived with George Meadows and his sister, Aunt Ann, on the Stanton estate. I call them aunt and uncle. Aunt Ann has often told me no relationship at all existed between us."

"You are an orphan, then?" suggested the sympathetic Ruth. "Is there no one in all the world related to you?"

"Yes—no—o," answered Madge, confusedly, thinking of Duncan, her young husband, and of the dearest relationship in all the world which existed between them.

"What a pity," sighed Ruth. "Well, Madge," she cried, impulsively throwing both her arms around her, and giving her a hearty kiss, "you and I will be all the world to each other. I shall tell you all my secrets, and you must tell me yours. There are some girls you can trust, and some you can't. If you tell them your secrets the first time you have a split your secret is a secret no longer, and every girl in the school knows all about it; but of course you are sure to make up again. But," added Ruth, with a wise look, "after you are once deceived you can never trust again."

"I have never known many girls," replied Madge. "I do not know how others do, but I'm sure you can always trust me."

And the two girls sealed their compact with a kiss just as the great bell in the belfry rang, warning them they must be at their lessons again as recess was over.

CHAPTER VIII.

In one of the private offices of Messrs. Frampton, Langley & Co., shrewd detectives, stood Duncan, waiting patiently until the senior member of the firm should be at leisure.

"Now, my dear sir, I will attend you with pleasure," said Mr. Frampton, sealing and despatching the note he had just finishing, and motioning Duncan to a seat.

"I shall be pleased if you will permit me to light a cigar," said Duncan, taking the seat indicated.

"Certainly, certainly; smoke, if you feel so inclined, by all means," replied the detective, watching with a puzzled twinkle in his eye the fair, boyish face of his visitor. "No, thank you," he said, as Duncan tendered him a Havana; "I never smoke during business hours."

"I wish to engage your services to find out the whereabouts of—of—of—my wife," said Duncan hesitatingly. "She has left me—suddenly. She fled—on the very night of our marriage."

It hurt Duncan's pride to make this admission, and a painful flush crept up into his fair face.

Mr. Frampton was decidedly amazed. He could not realize how any sane young woman could leave so handsome a young fellow as the one before him. In most cases the shoe was on the other foot. But he was too thoroughly master of his business to express his surprise. He merely said,—

"Go on, sir—go on."

And Duncan did go on, never sparing himself in describing how he urged Madge to marry him on the day after the *fête*, and of their parting, and the solemn promise to meet on the morrow, and of his wild grief—more bitter than death—when he had found the cottage empty.

"It reads like the page of a romance," said Duncan, with a dreamy smile, leaning his head on his white hand. "But I must find her!" he cried, with energy. "I will search the world over for her. If it takes every penny of my fortune, I will find Madge!"

Duncan looked out of the window at the soft, fleecy clouds overhead, little dreaming Madge was watching those self-same clouds, scarcely a

mile from the very spot where he sat, and that at that moment he was nearer Madge than he would be for years again, for the strong hand of Fate was slowly but surely drifting them asunder.

For some moments neither spoke.

"Perhaps," said Mr. Frampton, breaking the silence, "there was a previous lover in the case."

"I am sure there was not," said Duncan eagerly.

Still, the idea was new to him. He adored Madge with a mad, idolatrous adoration almost amounting to worship, and a love so intense is susceptible to the poisonous breath of jealousy, and jealousy ran in Duncan's veins. He could not endure the thought of Madge's—his Madge's—eyes brightening or her cheeks flushing at the approach of a rival—that fair, flower-like face, sweet and innocent as a child's—Madge, whom he so madly loved.

"Well," said Mr. Frampton, as Duncan arose to depart, "I will do all I can for you. Leave your address, please, in case I should wish to communicate with you."

"I think I shall go back to Daleville, and remain there at least a month. I have a strong conviction Madge might come back, or at least write to me there."

Mr. Frampton jotted down the address, feeling very sorry for the handsome young husband who was clinging to such a frail straw of hope.

In his own mind, long before Duncan had concluded his story, he had settled his opinion—that from some cause the young wife had fled from him with some rival, having bitterly repented her mad, hasty marriage.

"I have great faith in your acknowledged ability," said Duncan, grasping Mr. Frampton's outstretched hand. "I shall rest my hopes upon your finding Madge. I cannot—will not believe she is false. I would as soon think of the light of heaven playing me false as my sweet little love!"

The mantle of night had folded its dusky wings over the inmates of the seminary.

All the lights were out in the young ladies' rooms, as the nine o'clock call "All lights out!" had been called ten minutes before—all the lights save one, flickering dim and uncertain from Madge's window.

"Oh, dear!" cried Madge, laying her pink cheek down on the letter she was writing to Duncan, I feel as though I could do something very desperate to get away from here and go back to Duncan. Poor fellow!" she sighed. "I wonder what he thought as the hours rolled by and I did not come! Of course he went over to the cottage," she mused, "and Ann must have told him where I had gone. Duncan will surely come for me to-morrow," she told herself with a sweet, shy blush.

She read and re-read the letter her trembling little hand had penned with many a heart-futter.

It was a sweet, shy little letter, beginning with "Dear Mr. Duncan," and ending with "Yours sincerely, Madge."

It was just such a dear, timid letter as many a pure, fresh-hearted young girl would write, brimful of the love which filled her guileless heart for her handsome, debonaire husband, and with many allusions to the secret between them which weighed so heavily on her heart and sealed her lips for his dear sake.

After sealing and addressing her precious letter, and placing it in the letter-bag which hung at the lower end of the corridor, Madge hurried back to her own apartment, and crept softly into her little white bed beside Ruth, and was soon fast asleep, dreaming of Duncan, and a dark, haughty, scornful face falling between them and the sunshine—the cold, mocking face of Lena Stanton.

Madame Christine, as was her custom, always looked over the outgoing post early in the morning, sealing the letters of which she approved, and returning, with a severe reprimand, those which did not come up to her standard.

"What is this!" she cried, in amazement, turning the letter Madge had written in her hand.

"Why, I declare, it is actually sealed."

Without the least compunction she broke the seal, and grimly scanned its contents from begin-

ning to end. If there was anything under the sun that Madame abominated it was loveletters.

It was an established fact that no tender *billets-doux* found their way out or into the academy; the Argus-eyed madam was too watchful for that.

With a lowering brow she gave the bell-rope a hasty pull.

"Martin," she said to the servant answering her summons, "send Miss Meadows to me at once."

"Poor little thing," cried the sympathetic Martin, to herself. "I wonder what in the world is amiss now! There's fire in the madame's eyes. I hope she don't intend to scold poor little Madge."

Madge had taken a violent fancy to the sweet-faced, golden-haired, timid young stranger.

"It must be something terrible, I'm sure!" cried Ruth, when she heard that Madame had sent for Madge; while poor Madge's hand trembled so—she could scarcely tell why—that she could hardly bind up the golden curls that fell down to her waist in a wavy, shining mass.

Madge never once dreamed her letter was the cause of her unexpected summons until she entered Madame Christine's presence and saw it opened—yes, opened—her own sacred, loving letter to Duncan—in her hand.

Madge was impulsive, and her first thought was to grasp her precious letter and flee to her own room. How dared the madame open the precious letter she had intended only for Duncan's eyes!

"Miss Meadows," began the madame, impressively, "I suppose I am right in believing this epistle belongs to you?"

A great lump rose in Madge's throat.

"Yes, madame," answered Madge raising her dark-blue eyes pleadingly to the stern face before her.

"And may I ask by what right you dared violate the rules and regulations of this establishment by sending a sealed letter to—a man? Your guardian positively informed me you had no correspondents whatever, and I find this is a—I blush to confess it—actually a love letter. What have you to say in reference to your folly, Miss Meadows?"

"I'm sure I don't know," sobbed Madge.

"You don't know!" repeated the madame, scornfully. "Not a very satisfactory explanation. Well, Miss Meadows, I have fully determined what steps I shall take in the matter. I shall read this letter this morning before the whole school; it will afford me an excellent opportunity to point out the horrible depths to which young girls are plunged by allowing their minds to wander from their books to such thoughts as are here expressed. What do you mean by this secret to which you allude so often?" she asked.

"Please do not ask me, madame," sobbed Madge; "I cannot tell you—indeed I cannot. I dare not!"

An alarming thought occurred to madame.

"Speak, girl!" she cried, hoarsely, grasping her firmly by the shoulder. "I must know the meaning of this secret which is so appalling. You fear to reveal it! Does your guardian know of it?"

"No—o!" wailed Madge, "I could not tell him. I must keep the secret."

Poor little innocent Madge! her own words had convicted her beyond all doubt in the eyes of shrewd, suspicious Madame Christine, who guessed, as is usually the case, wide of the mark, as to the cause of the secret Madge dared not reveal to her guardian or herself.

"My duty is plain in this case," said the madame. "I shall read this as a terrible warning to the young ladies of this institution; then I will send for Mr. George Meadows, your guardian, and place this letter in his hands."

"Oh, no, madame, is pity's name, no!" sobbed Madge, wildly, kneeling imploringly at her feet, her heart beating tumultuously, and her hands locked convulsively together. "Do not, madame, I pray you; anything but that; he would cast me out of his heart and home, and I—I could not go to Duncan, you see."

But the madame did not see. She laughed a

little hard, metallic laugh, that grated cruelly on Madge's sensitive nerves.

When one woman's suspicions are aroused against another Heaven help the suspected one; there is little mercy shown her.

"Man's inhumanity to man" is nothing compared to woman's inhumanity to woman.

Madame Christine had discovered a capital way to score a hit in the direction of morality.

"No," she said, laying the letter down on the table before her. "Arise from your knees, Miss Meadows. Your prayers are useless. I think this will be a life-long lesson to you."

"Oh, madame, for the love of Heaven," cried Madge, rocking herself to and fro, "spare me, I beseech you! Can nothing alter your purpose?"

"Well," said madame, reflectively, "I may not be quite so severe with you if you will confess, unreservedly, the whole truth concerning this terrible secret, and what this young man Duncan is to you."

"I cannot," wailed Madge, "I cannot. Oh, my heart is breaking, yet I dare not!"

"Very well," said madame, rising, and indicating the conversation was at an end, "I shall not press you further on the subject. I will excuse you now, Miss Meadows. You may retire to your room."

Still Madge rocked herself to and fro on her knees at her feet. Suddenly a daring thought occurred to her. The letter which had caused her such bitter woe lay on the table almost within her very grasp—the letter, every line of which breathed of her pure, sacred love for Duncan—her Duncan—whom she dared not even claim. She could imagine madame commenting upon every word and sentence, ridiculing those tender expressions which had been such rapturous joy to her hungry little heart as she had penned them.

And, last of all, and far the most bitter thought, how dear old Uncle George would turn his honest eyes upon her tell-tale face and demand what the secret was—the secret which she had promised her young husband she would not reveal, come what would. If his face should grow white and stern, and those lips, which had blessed, praised, and petted, but never scolded her—if those lips should curse her, she would die then and there at his feet.

In an instant Madge had resolved upon a wild, hazardous plan. Quick as a flash of lightning she sprang to her feet and tore the coveted letter from the madame's detaining grasp.

The door stood open, and with the fleetness of a hunted deer she flew down the corridor, and never stopped for breath until she had gained the water's edge.

Madame Christine gave a loud shriek, and actually fainted, and the attendant who hurried to the scene caught but a glimpse of a terrified beautiful face and a cloud of flying golden hair.

No one in that establishment ever gazed on the face of Madge Meadows again.

(To be continued.)

ROSALIND.

—101—

(Continued from page 561.)

"When I was ten years old his health began to fail, and then he bought a small villa near Pisa—our first real home—which we only left afterwards for short periods. Nine years later my father heard of a great discovery of paintings in Rome, and, though it was the unhealthy season, he set off at once to examine them. He caught the terrible marsh fever, and we never saw him again."

Rosalind broke down utterly here, and it is some moments before she can continue.

"My mother was always excitable and nervous," she resumes, "and the terrible shock of our sudden loss threw her into an illness which lasted many months."

"When she began to recover strength she had

a new anxiety. The usual remittances had not arrived from England, and we were at the end of our resources."

"She wrote at once to the steward, whose name and address she discovered amongst the few papers my father had kept, and after long suspense received a very brief answer:—Mr. James Heron, my father's half-brother and heir-at-law, was in possession of the property, and she was advised to communicate directly with him."

"She had no one to consult. She had not the smallest knowledge of English law. She had never even heard of this half-brother. As soon as she received the steward's letter she wrote to Mr. James Heron enclosing my father's will and her marriage certificate in support of her claim, and innocently asking him what her next step ought to be."

"Two months passed by and brought her no answer. Then in despair, she sold some of her most valuable things, dismissed all the servants except her own maid, and leaving my old nurse in charge of the villa, started for England with Babette and me."

"I hardly know how to tell you the rest," says poor Rosalind, hiding her face for a moment in her hands. "I must hurry over it, and you must spare me the details."

"We came here—to my father's birthplace—expecting justice at least. We were met with incredulity, cruelty—even insult. Mr. Heron declared that he had never received my mother's letter, nor seen the documents she 'professed' to have sent him. He had never heard of our existence (which is most probable), and protested that he had small belief in our being what we claimed to be."

"Argument and remonstrance were all of no avail. Under the circumstances we really had no proof to produce, and we were helpless in his hands."

"The overwhelming disappointment and the useless indignation my poor mother felt—her agony of shame for herself and me—coming so soon after so much sorrow—threw her into another and more serious illness, and when she partially recovered her mind was what you have seen."

"Mr. Heron, with great show of forbearance and generosity, has given us a shelter under his roof on the express condition that we shall claim nothing more. He pretends," adds Rosalind, with burning cheeks, "he dares to pretend that we have no legal claim upon him. And for the sake of my poor helpless mother I must submit to eat the bread given me by one whom I can never look at without bitterness of heart."

"What do you suppose really became of the letter and enclosures? Is your uncle villain enough to have destroyed them?"

"How can I tell? He professed to make strict inquiries at the post-offices here and abroad, and to be utterly unable to trace them. I only know that they were sent, and that it was to his interest they should not be received. But I can prove nothing."

"What does Philip believe?"

"I can hardly tell. I think he does not know the whole story. He was away from home when his father drove his hard bargain with me—food and shelter on condition of utter silence and seclusion—for there is nothing that Mr. Heron seems to dread so much as the scandal of our story becoming known. Perhaps he fears that some one might be induced to take up our claim—but to what purpose, since we have no proofs? My mother's memory is gone, and she can give no clue whatever to the past."

"Mr. Heron would run some risk himself in keeping your mother here if her mind were supposed to be seriously affected."

"I know! I know!" cries Rosalind, in acute distress. "One of the threats he holds over me is that he could place my mother in—in an asylum. My poor, timid mother! That would soon kill her."

"Philip knows you are living here!"

"Oh, yes! He is always kind—that is, in manner. But he is entirely influenced by his father, and has been taught that we are only here on sufferance. Mr. Heron has repeatedly warned me that on the first attempt to assume

my father's name, or enlist any sympathy for ourselves, we shall forfeit any help from him. What can I do but submit?"

"You have an alternative now, Rosalind."

"Less now than ever," she cries passionately. "Do you think I will involve you in our disgrace? You know now why I was so alarmed lest I should be recognised that night at Forham. I had gone out (without leave) to get a particular medicine for my mother from the next town, and then found that I had no means of getting back. What should I have done without you?"

"Not much better, I suppose, than I should have done without you in my illness."

She smiles and sighs.

"Dr. Hart is allowed to attend my mother and Withers and Babette wait on us. Babette is tolerated because she cannot speak a word of English. I do not know what the others have been told about us; but I think Dr. Hart, at least, suspects that there is something behind."

"What does he say of your mother?"

"He thinks her case curable. At all events, he thinks that change of scene and more society—anything that would rouse her, and prevent her dwelling so constantly on one idea—would give her mind a chance of recovery. Once I made a desperate effort to induce my cousin Philip to get permission for us to go away—but it was useless."

A light flashes upon me at those words. That must have been the subject of the midnight interview, at which I dare not tell Rosalind I was present.

"I must leave you now," she says, pausing at the end of the avenue. "I have broken every promise I made to Mr. Heron in telling you all this. But I did it for your sake. It was better you should know all the barriers that stand between us."

"I do not care for one of them. It is in your own power now to put an end to all your troubles. If you will come to me your mother shall have travel, society, amusement—all she needs. We will restore her health—we will prove her claim—we will all be happy."

Rosalind shakes her head, though tears are falling down her cheeks.

"Rosalind, listen! If I were a rich, vulgar, ignorant old blockhead whom you detested, and made the same proposals to you, you would think it your duty to sacrifice yourself for your mother's sake. You know you would! Then—"

"Perhaps I might," she says, interrupting me. "But I will never sacrifice you."

Before I can make any reply Withers hurries towards us.

"I've been looking everywhere for you, sir!" she cries. "The carriage has been ready ever so long, and James says it will be as much as he can do to catch your train."

So I can only grasp Rosalind's hands hard within my own, and whisper,—

"We will soon meet again," and hurry away.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN I told Rosalind that I should soon see her again I most fully intended to do so. But in pacing up and down my second floor at Lincoln's-inn, ceaselessly revolving her story and what can possibly be done for her, I fail to discover any excuse for returning to Maple Hill, or any fresh argument to strengthen my cause.

Amongst all my perplexities there is some satisfaction in reverting to my boyish antipathy towards Mr. Heron.

"I always knew he was a cad and a screw!" I say to myself, as for the hundredth time I pass the whole strange story in review; "but I little thought he was such a thorough-paced scoundrel. There's something in intuitions, after all. Poor Philip! I pity him for having such a father."

A lucky idea occurs to me. I will go to Laura Beauchamp and see if she can suggest any way

out of the labyrinth in which our affairs are involved.

Soon after three o'clock I present myself at my cousin's pretty Kensington house, and am received with a mixture of delight at my reappearance, commiseration for my illness, lamentation over my injured arm, and congratulation on my recovery—which would be comic, if it were not so genuinely kind.

I tell Laura that I have sought her out in order to have a long, uninterrupted, confidential talk. Nothing could please her more. Forthwith, her servants are warned against admitting any visitor, and she listens (under the seal of the strictest secrecy) with absorbing interest to a full revelation of all my adventures at Maple Hill, and all my hopes and fears concerning Rosalind.

"It doesn't seem a bright prospect for you, my poor Gerard, in any case!" she says, at last.

"Wait till you know Rosalind," I answer, confidently. "After all, you know a man can but be happy in his own way."

"Are you quite sure, supposing the present difficulties could be cleared away, that you would be justified in taking charge of an inexperienced wife, and a very peculiar mother-in-law?"

"Peculiarly justified, do you mean?" I inquire with a rush of blissful emotion such as the appellation "mother-in-law," I believe, rarely occasions.

"Yes."

"Perfectly. I have not, of course, what a girl in society, like Honora Corbet, for instance, would call enough to marry upon."

"Oh Honora!" exclaims my cousin with an intonation which shows that she thinks I have had a lucky escape from that siren at any cost.

"But Rosalind is quite different. I am sure she would be satisfied with the home I could give her. I only wish she would try."

"And are you sure?" pursues Laura, judiciously, "that you could endure the constant society of such a very depressing person as poor Mrs. Heron must be for it would be clearly impossible, under the circumstances, to separate mother and daughter."

"Of course I should not dream of it. But things may not always be so bad. Hart thinks her curable, you know?"

"Yes," says Laura, thoughtfully. "Well, I begin to see a glimmering possibility of helping you over some of your troubles!"

"You really do?"

"Why, what did you expect, when you came to lay your case before me?" she asks, playfully. "Don't waste any ectasies on me, Gerard. Tell me, how long are the other Herons likely to be away from Maple Hill?"

"Only long enough to have it thoroughly disinfected, I should think."

"Heartless creatures! But on the whole I am rather glad they behaved so badly, because I don't feel any compunction at stealing a march on them. Well, I have no time to lose. Come here again to-morrow week, Gerard; and now don't hinder me for another moment."

I dare not ask any questions, nor appeal against, what seems to me, an endless interval. There is a resolution in my cousin's look and manner, which reduces me to silent obedience; and, besides, I know of old that if she is not allowed to do things in her own way she is quite capable of throwing the whole affair up and doing nothing at all.

I scarcely know now how I got through the prescribed period of waiting—never, surely, was week so long!

But "time and the hour wear through the longest day," and at last they bring round the moment when I may again present myself before my cousin.

"Well, Laura!" I exclaim, hurrying into her pretty drawing-room, "confess that I have waited obediently, if not patiently. And now what news have you for me?"

But the lady standing by the further window, who turns in answer to my eager appeal, is not Laura—it is Rosalind herself!

"You know, Gerard," begins my cousin, an

hour later, when, Rosalind having gone to attend to her mother, I beg to be told how she brought about this blessed state of things—"you know how often you have laughed at me for having 'all sorts and conditions of men' on my visiting lists. It turns out to be very fortunate sometimes, for some people, that it should be so."

"One friend of mine is a great specialist in mental disorders, and after hearing your story I made up my mind to have his opinion about Rosalind's mother."

"So I went straight off to his consulting-room when you left me, told him all that was necessary of the case, and made an appointment to journey with him to Maple Hill on Wednesday."

"How in the world did you get admitted?"

"By sheer pertinacity, my dear. I took a fly from Forham, left Dr. Winter sitting in it at the park gates, presented myself at the hall door, asked for Withers, won her ears by thanking her for the care she had taken of my cousin (you are a favourite with the old woman), and argued, entreated, and at last prevailed with her to take me to Rosalind."

Here Laura pauses, out of breath.

"My hardest work began then," she resumes, more seriously. "But I appealed to her courtesy not to affront a man of Dr. Winter's professional standing by refusing him admittance after so long a journey and such a sacrifice of valuable time."

"And I convinced her that in a matter of such vital importance to her mother she would be more than justified in taking the law into her own hands."

"So we fetched him in, and he quite confirmed your young friend Dr. Hart's view that poor Mrs. Heron's case is simply one of acute monomania, arising from shock to an overwrought nervous system."

"And he also says that there is no more danger of Rosalind, with her totally different temperament, inheriting insanity from her than of my doing so—and that, Gerard, was a dreadful 'Hon in the way' slain and trampled upon. Don't interrupt me, there's a good boy. I haven't nearly finished my story."

"Dr. Winter added, that change of scene and cheerful society were indispensable to Mrs. Heron's health, both physical and mental (just what your friend had said), and he strongly advised trying the effect of travel."

"He thought it quite possible that finding herself in the old scenes might have a beneficial effect on her memory—at any rate, it was worth trying."

"I have unbounded faith in the theory of both these men, Laura. But, under the circumstances, I don't quite see how their prescription is to be administered."

"The only way," she answers, looking very keenly and steadily at me, "the only way to manage it would be—if you are quite sure of your own feelings—to marry Rosalind as soon as you legally can, and take her mother to Pisa with you for the honeymoon."

"Laura, you're a witch—I mean a fairy—I mean my good angel! But do you think Rosalind could ever be brought to consent?"

"You had better ask her," replies my cousin, drily. "Stop! stop! you foolish boy; I don't mean this instant. I have more to tell you yet. When once we had convinced Rosalind that at all hazards her mother must be got away from Maple Hill I released Dr. Winter, and he drove back to Forham, promising that the fly should return in a couple of hours, which was all the time I could allow for packing and preparation."

"I worked as hard as anyone myself to get them off—I was so afraid of second thoughts, misgivings, and changes of mind."

"I directed Withers to tell Mr. and Mrs. James Heron, when they returned, that the ladies had left Maple Hill for change of air with an intimate friend. And I was delighted to hear that they are not expected till next month, for, I want you to get clear away without interference. After we got here I had several quiet conversations with Rosalind about you, and I think I have convinced her—from the point of view of an impartial third person—that you will be better off with her than without her."

"The argument that most weighed with her, after all, was this: 'If your mother should recover her memory, and be able to prove her case, you will be an heiress. And you may be quite certain that if you persist in refusing Gerard now he will refuse you then!' It was all moonshine, of course—I mean as to her chance of a fortune—but it was too much for Miss Rosalind."

"I have done a good many clever things in my time," concludes my cousin, with cheerful self-complacency; "but I never ran away with a man's lady-love for him before! Arthur was quite against it at first, and thought I had been too precipitate. But what, except extra trouble and worry, should we have gained by delay?"

"You are a Bismarck in petticoats, Laura! But there's one thing I can't delay any longer, and that is finding Rosalind!"

Laura's programme is carried out to the letter. Her husband, seeing that we are all committed beyond possibility of drawing back, enters into the affair with as much spirit as herself, and gives away the bride at the very quiet ceremony which unites us.

He and Laura came with us to Victoria station to see us off by the tidal train, and look after my mother-in-law and Babette—the latter being almost unmanageable with delight at the thought of leaving England.

"Poor dear Gerard!" I hear Laura exclaim, as she stands on the platform with her hands clasped on her husband's arm, watching our train slowly move away. "What a strange wedding! And what a strange honeymoon! They will require a great deal of love to sweeten them!"

And we have it.

CHAPTER IX.

ONCE across the Channel we take our time over our journey. And what a journey it is! How clear are the skies, how sweet is the air! How amusing even the most commonplace incidents become to a foolish young couple, tasting for the first time the delight of free, full, unfettered companionship!

It is uncommonly pleasant to be a hero to one's wife—and in Rosalind's eyes I am a champion, deliverer. Bayard and the Admirable Crichton "rolled into one."

To me, after my rough handling by fate and Honora Corbet, the enthusiasm of a charming girl with plenty of common sense on all other points is very balm. Ah! why cannot one always be twenty-six, newly-married, and madly in love with one's wife!

As to my mother-in-law, in whom even the sanguine Laura saw such a drawback to our happiness, she grows brighter with every hour that carries her further from Maple Hill.

The melancholy refrain becomes less and less frequent. She talks more connectedly, walks more firmly, begins to lose the startled, wandering gaze which spoke so plainly of a mind unstrung.

She is quite safe and happy with her devoted Babette, while Rosalind and I make long excursions round our various halting-places. It is impossible to ascertain whether Mrs. Heron recognizes the scenes through which we pass, and is glad to revisit them; or whether she only takes a child's pleasure in exercise and change. But the time approaches for the crucial test, and I can see that Rosalind's heart is torn between hope and fear.

Mrs. Heron takes little notice of Pisa, though her daughter's eyes overflow when we drive through the familiar streets. But, as we leave the town behind and slowly ascend a wooded hill, her colour rises, and a strange light comes into her face.

"Stop the carriage, if you please," she says, turning to me. "I should prefer to walk."

I help her to alight, and she takes my arm, but scarcely seems to need it. She turns to the right, out of the carriage road, and we see before us a white villa, gleaming among olive and cypress trees.

"Rosalind!" she cries, sharply, looking round for her daughter; "this is home! I thought I

should never see it again. Thank, Heaven, I have lived to come home! and, falling on her knees as we reach the door, she kissed the threshold!

"It seems like a dream, love," whispers Rosalind, as we stand, very close together, at one of the moonlit windows when our little household has gone to rest. "Like a dream to be in my old home with you. I almost fear to move or speak lest I should awake amidst all the misery of Maple Hill!"

A convincing way of assuring her, that she is not dreaming occurs to me; but, drawing back from my kiss, she continues,—

"I feel strangely nervous to night, as if some catastrophe was hanging over us—as if my uncle might come in presently and part us. You would not let him do it, would you, Gerard? Hark! Is not that a footstep?"

"Dear, you are over-tired and fanciful. I think you and your mother must have changed places for once!"

"Yes. Is not she wonderful! What those wise doctors said seems to be coming true. But, Gerard, how shall we ever persuade her to come away!"

"We need not think about that just yet. She has been so much more calm and reasonable lately that when we are compelled to return to England there may not be much difficulty. And I promise to bring you both back every year."

"You are so good to us!"

"Are not you all the world to me?"

But Rosalind starts from my encircling arm, exclaiming,—

"That was a footstep that I heard, Gerard, and now it is close to this door!"

In truth as she speaks the door is thrown open and her mother enters in her dressing gown, with a shawl round her shoulders and her long, grey hair hanging loose.

My first thought is that the trial has been too great for her strength, and that her mental disturbance is increased. But she looks very calm, and her voice is gentle and steady.

"Don't be alarmed," she says. "I have come down because I cannot sleep yet. My mind is too full of hurrying thoughts. I begin to remember everything. This was your father's studio, Rosalind; and that is the writing-table he always used. A fancy crossed me just now, and I could not rest without putting it to the test."

Whilst speaking she has crossed over to the writing-table, and opened it. There, amidst old letters and unused writing-paper, lies her own packet, with its priceless enclosures—sealed, and addressed to James Heron, but never sent—pushed away by her own hands, and forgotten, in that first unsettlement of her brain, which afterwards increased so rapidly.

Of course after this discovery it is impossible for Mr. Heron to show fight. I can never quite determine in my own mind whether he really believed or only very strongly hoped that my mother-in-law was not his brother's wife. And I can never forgive him for the cruel and cowardly manner in which he endeavoured to crush her claims. But he was not the guilty man we had been led to suppose him, after all, and this fact gives us a basis for coming to a peaceable understanding. We do not propose to have any family gathering at present; but when Rosalind and I have returned to town, leaving Mrs. Heron, at her own strong entreaty, in the Pisa villa with Antonio and Babette, Philip pays us a visit of his own proposing, and in a very manly, straightforward way congratulates us on all our happy prospects.

"You may think it an odd thing for me to say, old fellow," he concludes; "but really it's rather a relief that the whole business is cleared up at last. It worried me a good deal more than I liked to admit, I can tell you, for I thought the governor did not look into it so thoroughly as he ought. I'm almost ashamed to own it, but I was afraid sometimes it wasn't all quite square."

My wife and I glance at each other; we have

already agreed that some way must be found of lightening the loss to Philip, and this speech of his does not make us at all less anxious to help him.

He has bidden us a cordial good-bye, but when his hand is on the door he turns back, as though he had forgotten something.

"By the way, Rosalind," he says, laughing rather uneasily, "I must not omit to say that I ought to be rather grateful to you, on the whole, for cutting me out of the family property. You have saved me from matrimony! Honora Corbet took leave of me in the sweetest way when she heard the first rumour of my altered prospects, and yesterday she was married to Everard Grove. The crooked stick at last!"

[THE END.]

FACETIE.

SHE: "And what would you be now if it weren't for my money!" He: "A bachelor."

"The doctors have given Smith up." "Poor fellow! Is he as ill as that?" "No; he has got well."

JIMSON: "How many foreign languages can your wife speak?" Timson: "Three—French, German, and the one she talks to the baby."

BOUNDERBY (after surveying the company): "Mixed lot! Hardly a gentleman in the room." Pecky Sharpe (looking straight at him): "Not one—that I can see!"

DOCTOR: "The bicycle gives people the best exercise in the world." Patient: "But I can't afford to ride a bicycle." "Oh, you don't need to ride one; just dodge them."

OMNIBUS CONDUCTOR: "Pay up now, or get off." Dignified Old Gentleman: "What do you take me for, sir?" Conductor: "Penny to Liverpool-street, same as anybody else."

LADY (of a certain age): "I like this dress, but it does not match my complexion." Candid Friend: "Oh, that's but a trifle. You can alter your complexion to suit."

"SOBBING WIFE: "Three years ago you swore eternal love, and—" Brutal Hubby: "How long do you expect eternal love to last, anyway?"

"ALICE is such a conscientious little goose," said one sensible girl to another. "How's that?" "She thinks she must go to the trouble of breaking one engagement before contracting another."

THE SUMMER GIRL: "Oh, I love to hear you read your poems. It makes me realise how brave you are." The Poet: "Brave?" Girl: "Yes, brave; you said you took them yourself to the publishers."

WALTON: "Why did Jones break off his engagement with Miss Oldacre?" Jackson: "On account of her past." "What was the matter with it?" "Nothing, only he thought it was too long."

MISS DE FASHION: "Mother, what shall we send Miss Style for her wedding present?" Mrs. De Fashion: "Will the list be published in the paper?" "No; she says that's vulgar." "Send her a plated saltpoon."

FATHER: "I am very much afraid our daughter will elope with that young rascal." Mother: "No danger. I reminded her last evening that girls who eloped got no wedding presents, and I feel sure that my words sunk deep into her heart."

A DEAR old lady went to a dog-fancier to buy a dog. "What sort of dog do you want?" the dog-fancier said. "Is it to be a pointer, or an Irish terrier, or a collie, or what?" "Oh," she said, "I really don't mind, provided he suits the drawing-room carpet!"

MAMMA: "Yes, darling; those dear little boys have no father and no mother—and no good Aunt Jane. Aren't you sorry for them?" Freddy (no great admirer of his stingy aunt): "Oh, poor little boys! (With cheerful alacrity) Mummy, dear, may I give them Aunt Jane?"

A GOOD baby story is of a neighbour meeting a little one on the street, and saying, "Good-morning, my little dear. I never can tell you and your sister apart. Which of the twins are you?" And the little dear made answer, "I'm the one what's out walkin'."

A COUNTRYMAN saw for the first time a school-girl going through her gymnastic exercise for the amusement of the little ones at home. After gazing at her with looks of interest and commiseration for some time, he asked a boy near if that girl had fits. "No," replied the boy, "them's gymnastics." "Ah, how sad!" said the man. "How long's she had 'em?"

THEY had agreed that they were not meant for each other. "Here is your ring," said the maiden. "I suppose you will bestow it on another girl now!" "No," he replied. "You don't mean that you will never again become engaged!" she asked, a little wistfully. "I don't mean that, but just now I hope to raise enough money on that ring to pay my last month's washing bill."

A LAUGHABLE illustration of how anger causes a man to make himself ridiculous is given in the following incident, related in a German newspaper. Banker Rosenthal directed his book-keeper to address a sharp letter to Baron Y—, who had promised several times to pay what he owed, and had as often neglected to do so. When the letter was written it did not please Banker Rosenthal, who is very excitable, and he angrily penned the following:—"Dear Baron Y—, Who was it that promised to pay up on the first of January? You, my dear Baron, you are the man. Who was it that promised then to settle on the first of March? You, my dear Baron. Who was it that didn't settle on the first of March? You, my dear Baron. Who is it, then, who has broken his word twice, and is an unmitigated scoundrel? Your obedient servant, Moses Rosenthal."

COUNTRY lawyers are often forced, by the scarcity of business, to look very sharp for opportunities to draw up wills and perform other "legal" services. A stranger of mature years—a carpenter, who had come to a certain town to work at his trade, was asked several times by a local lawyer if he did not think he had better make his will. At last the carpenter took the delighted lawyer aside, and said to him with an important air: "I ain't quite ready to make my will, but when I am I'll let you do it." "Good! But now's the time to draw it up!" "Well, the fact is, I've had a disagreement with my sister Jane, and I ain't going to leave her a penny." "Good! But have you any other relatives?" "Yes; one sister and a nephew." "Good! Any disagreement with them?" "None whatever. But I ain't—I'll tell it to you particular—I ain't going to leave either one of them a penny, neither!" "Now, why is that, pray?" "Because I haven't got a penny to leave to anybody!" Whereupon the lawyer hastily took his departure, and troubled the carpenter no more about his will.

It was in one of the cosy villages of bonnie Scotland, where gossip is the chief barter and church the chief duty of every "mon" and all the "weemin." For once gossip and church were travelling the same way, for Dougald McSorlie, the minister, had suddenly grown unpopular, and the numbers of his congregation were steadily diminishing. No one knew better than he that something must be done; so he concluded to do a little house-to-house missionary work, and thus arouse more interest in church affairs. But his enthusiasm was short lived. The first man he accosted was Donald Campbell, a sturdy old Scot of well-known free-thinking tendencies. "Donald," began the minister, "for why were ye no' at the kirk last Sabbath?" "I was at Mr. McShouter's kirk, meenister." This was hardly the reply that was expected, but the minister continued with added gravity of tone: "I dinna like ye rinnin' about the strange kirks in this waye. I'm pairfectly sure ye yerse' widna like yer ain' sheep strayin' awa' into strange pastures." Donald cast a sideways glance at his critic. "I widna care a grain, meenister, gin it was better grass."

SOCIETY.

THE Queen, according to existing arrangements, will remain in the Highlands about two months.

THE Queen is expected to visit the Duke of Norfolk at Arundel Castle early next spring, by which time the grand additions and decorations will be properly completed.

PRINCE HENRY OF BATTEMBERG has offered a challenge cup to be competed for annually by the members of the Isle of Wight Fire Brigades Association.

This year it is not the intention of the Princess of Wales to visit Scotland; and, with the exception of Princess Victoria of Schleswig-Holstein, none of the Queen's unmarried granddaughters will be in the kingdom.

THE Duke and Duchess of York are going to spend some weeks at Old Mar Lodge, visiting Balmoral to see the Queen as often as possible. Little Prince Edward now begins to toddle by himself, but he is not to be put in knickerbockers until he is two years old.

THE Prince of Wales will probably be the guest of Mr. Robert Vyner for two or three days during the third week in October, at Newby Hall, Yorkshire. Newby is a fine place on the banks of the Ure, a few miles below Ripon, and the house (which was designed by Sir Christopher Wren) contains some splendid Gobelin tapestry and an important collection of sculpture.

SINCE Nicholas II. has come to the throne of Russia the English language resounds through all the salons of the Imperial Palace, and with the language the habits and manners of Old England have made their triumphant entry into the Czar's Court, for it is the young Czarina who has thus changed it. English is her native tongue, so to say, although she is German; and to please the graceful Sovereign all her entourage try to speak English, so much the more so as the Czar himself always speaks to his wife in that language.

THE question of succession to the Hanoverian throne has been settled, and the Prince George of Hanover, the Duke and Duchess of Cumberland's eldest son, is to succeed eventually to the kingdom of Hanover, and to be in the same position towards the Emperor of Germany as the Kings of Wurtemberg and Saxony. The succession has been a very vexed question for a long time, and the Queen herself, springing from the Hanoverian line, has deeply felt the extinction of its kingdom. Prince George is now approaching the termination of his fifteenth year, and is being educated and brought up with a view to his future position. His mother is, as will be remembered, the Princess of Wales's youngest sister, and is by no means strong; her family consists of three sons and three daughters.

PRINCE FREDERICK OF SCHAUMBURG-LIPPE, who is to marry Princess Louise of Denmark, is the eldest son of Prince William of Schaumburg-Lippe (whose large estates in Bohemia he will inherit), and a brother of the Queen of Wurtemberg, and of the Princess of Waldeck and Pyrmont. Princess Louise will have a fortune of two millions of marks. It is expected that Prince and Princess Henry of Prussia will attend the wedding as representatives of the German Emperor and Empress; and the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess Serge will probably come from St. Petersburg. The marriage is to take place at Copenhagen about October 30th, and there will be a great gathering of the Royal Family on the occasion, including the Princess of Wales, the King and Queen of the Hellenes, the Duke and Duchess of Cumberland, the Hereditary Prince and Princess of Nassau-Luxemburg, Prince and Princess Frederick Charles of Hesse, Prince and Princess Adolphus of Schaumburg-Lippe, the King and Queen of Sweden, Prince and Princess Albert of Anhalt-Desau, and possibly the Prince of Wales or the Duke of York and the Duke of Cambridge.

STATISTICS.

THERE are thirteen thousand distinct varieties of postage stamps.

THE highest point on Hampstead Heath is 400 feet above sea level.

ON an average, every inhabitant of this country uses ten pounds weight of soap in a year.

THE average weight and height of natives are below those of sane people.

A GRAM of fine sand would cover one hundred of the minute scales of the human skin, and yet each of these scales in turn covers from three hundred to five hundred pores.

GEMS.

OUT the cloud that wraps the present hour serves to brighten all our future days.

THE city does not take away, neither can the country give, solitude; solitude is within us.

IT argues a poor opinion of ourselves when we cannot admit any other class of merit beside our own, or any rival in that class.

ONE couldn't carry on life comfortably without a little blindness to the fact that everything has been said better than we can put it ourselves.

AS we ascend in society, like those who climb a mountain, we shall find that the climate of perpetual congelation commences with the higher circles, and the nearer we approach to the grand luminary the court, the more frigidity and apathy shall we experience.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

COCONUT FILLING OR FROSTING.—Whites of two eggs, one cup of powdered sugar, one cup of coconut; beat well; spread on the top of cake or pie; then drop some of the dry coconut over the top.

POTATO PUFFS.—Boil three large potatoes, mash while hot, add pepper and salt, a little onion juice, a bit of butter, and an egg. When very light, drop by large spoonfuls on to a layer of crumbs and roll into balls or croquettes, frying in hot fat.

CUCUMBER KITCHER.—Peel and grate twelve large cucumbers and lay in a deep dish with a teaspoon of salt. Let it stand until the next morning, then lay it in a fine sieve; when well drained, put in vinegar to make it of the proper consistence, and season with pepper. Bottle and seal.

PEACH DUMPLINGS.—These dumplings may be made of either fresh or canned peaches, but are better of the fresh. Make a rich biscuit crust, cut in squares large enough to fold over the peach, and steam for half an hour; do not uncover during that time. Serve with hard sauce. If canned peaches are used, two of the halves should be put in each piece of crust, and the syrup will make a delicious sauce by adding one cup of sugar and boiling ten minutes, then adding a teaspoonful of butter and a heaping one of cornstarch dissolved in a little cold water and boiled up once. A bit of nutmeg is an improvement.

SPICE CAKE.—Quarter pound butter, half pound sugar, three-quarters pound flour, three eggs, one teaspoon milk, half teaspoon baking soda, half teaspoon tartaric acid, two teaspoons mixed spices, quarter pound almonds or raisins. Put the butter and sugar in a basin and beat with a spoon till it all looks white; then separate the yolks and whites of the eggs. Mix the yolks and the milk together and put in, then put in the flour, having the soda, tartaric, and spice mixed through it; mix all well, giving it a good beating. Beat the whites to snow, and put them in last with the fruit. Put it in a well-papered and buttered tin, and bake till it is ready.

MISCELLANEOUS.

PAPER stockings, in varied hues, are worn in China.

TELEGRAPH poles made of paper pulp are coming into use in Copenhagen. They are hollow, and a coating of silicate of potash protects them from decay.

THE process of toasting is said to induce a peculiar chemical change in the bread, giving it a more appetising flavour, as well as certain valuable properties.

IT is a curious fact that no married subject in Austria can procure a passport to go beyond the frontier unless he can produce a written consent from his wife.

WHEN eating, the Eskimos all sit around in a circle and the food is placed on the floor in the centre of the group. No meal is ready to be eaten until a vessel containing seal oil is at hand.

CHINESE dentists rub a secret powder on the gum over the affected tooth, and after about five minutes the patient is told to sneeze. The tooth then falls out. Many attempts have been made by Europeans to secure this powder, but none have ever succeeded in doing so.

THE richest and most complete bath yet found in the ruins of Pompeii has recently been discovered. It is a large building, with sculptured basins, heating apparatus, lead pipes, and bronze faucets. The walls and floor are tiled. Everything is in an almost perfect state of preservation, owing to the roof having remained intact when the city was buried in the year 79.

THE Japanese soldiers are being dressed in paper clothing. The shirts and trousers are all composed of specially prepared paper, of a yellowish colour. They are bound with linen binding, and are partly pasted together and partly sewn with a machine. When the clothes, which are very durable, are worn out, they are thrown away and replaced by new ones.

A NEW ambulance carriage has been invented in Berlin. It is not drawn by horses or men in the ordinary way, but is propelled by cyclists, and consists of a kind of litter resting on a frame with five wheels, three in front in the form of an ordinary tricycle, and two at the back. The drivers accordingly sit one at each end of the litter, which is covered with a removable roof, with little windows and a pneumatic bell, so that the patient can communicate with the drivers. Beneath the litter are boxes for dressing material, instruments for first aid, and so forth.

ALL the members of the Royal Family have certain hobbies. Of china, bronzes, and other works of art there is no better judge than the Prince of Wales; at the war game the Duke of Connaught is not to be beaten; while the late Duke of Albany, as a critic of Shakespeare and collector of folios and quartos, was well known. The Duke of Edinburgh, besides being a clever violin player, is an enthusiastic postage stamp collector. The powers of the Empress Frederick and Princess Christian with the pen would get them a good living any day; the Marchioness of Lorne is as good at painting as at sculpture, while the Princess Beatrice is one of the best amateur actresses. Taken together, the Queen's sons and daughters are not wanting in versatility.

PROBABLY the most wonderful example of avian indifference to frost, or rather of the want of effect of the coldest water on birds' legs, is exemplified in the habits of the humming birds of America. The diminutive size of these creatures and the delicacy of their bones and the whole nervous system are notorious. The broad-tailed species is no larger than one of our common bumblebees. They wake up very early in the morning, and go to water at daylight, no matter how cold the weather is. During the month of August, when the mornings were often frosty, hundreds of them came to the spring to drink and bathe at break of day. They would drop down to their water, dip their feet and bellies, and rise and shoot away as if propelled by an unseen power.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

AGNES.—Try the sulphur skin soap.
PROBY.—By pouring boiling water over them.
T. E.—Yes, if properly drafted and executed.
NESSE.—Six months' notice appears to be necessary.
THROUBLED.—The only real cure is extraction by operation.
EDIE.—Lemonade taken occasionally is a healthful drink.
QUEENIE.—Look in the Directory; addresses are never given.
ANXIOUS.—We do not know of anything to recommend.
J. F.—Application should be made to the headquarters.
BOB.—The Himalaya Mountains have been seen 224 miles away.
CURIOUS.—Blotting paper is made of cotton rags boiled in soda.
COMFORT READER.—You had better apply to some scholastic agency.
Y. B.—The hair of the Cashmere goat is about eighteen inches in length.
HELEN.—The average height of women is stated to be five feet four inches.
JACK.—He would have to pass a very stringent medical examination.
LOVALIST.—Windsor Castle has been used as a Royal residence for 784 years.
KATHIE.—Epping Forest is the largest public recreation ground in the world.
L. L.—Try rubbing lamp chimneys with a little kerosene on a piece of newspaper.
J. R.—Prince Henry of Battenberg receives no grant from the British Government.
OLD SUBSCRIBER.—We do not consider the question suitable for reply in our columns.
INTERESTED.—The chief supply of platinum comes from the Ural Mountains, Russia.
ANNA.—The discoloration could not be removed without risk of injury to the fabric.
W. J.—We know of nothing that will have the desired effect without injury to the skin.
O. K.—Descriptions are, as a rule, insufficient to enable one to give an intelligent answer.
JOWELL.—If necessary to be polished they should be put in the hands of an experienced jeweller.
LAUREN.—The Home Rule Bill was passed by Commons and rejected by Lords in September, 1893.
J. G. W.—We are sorry we cannot give the information required, not having a Canadian Directory.
B. V.—The complaint appears to be of paralytic nature; if so it is beyond remedy. Consult a vet.
SUFFERER.—It might be well to ask the advice of a physician, or to take a few baths and note their effect.
HAROLD.—There is only one way to ascertain the value of a picture; ask a dealer to state what he would give.
MISERABLE KENNETH.—You should receive her silence as an intimation that your addresses are not agreeable to her.
R. S.—Apply a little oil round the stopper; then stand the bottle in fairly hot water up to but not over the neck rim.
MARGERY.—The thinnest glass tumbler or goblet may be put in the hottest water without fear of injury if it is laid in sideways.
COUNTYFIED.—It would be useless for you to come to London in the hope of obtaining such a situation as you require.
REVUE.—St. Paul's Cathedral was built from designs of the celebrated Sir Christopher Wren, begun in June, 1675, and completed in December, 1710.
HORATIO.—The loadstone is a species of iron ore of a blackish colour, found in the iron mines of Germany, England, Arabia, and other countries.
STELLA.—One of the best things to do is to wet the face frequently with a cloth dipped in soft water containing a little glycerine and rose water.
H. G.—In some cases to rub in the powder after you have wetted the place with warm water, and then pour hot water through it is most effective.
LEWIS.—We cannot suggest anything to add to the vinegar—if you followed the directions closely it should have been all right. We are pleased to know that the Reader gives you so much satisfaction.
PONY.—Regular and close cutting of hair should tend to strengthen it, especially if the head is washed occasionally to free it of scurf, which destroys the hair roots.
P. T.—It is very dangerous to attempt to remove moles. It is much better to let them alone than to run the risk of producing some malignant growth. No one knows their cause, and the danger run in attempting to get rid of them is altogether too great.

B. K.—Baths the parts affected with sweet spirits of nitre. Three or four applications are generally sufficient, even in severe cases. Sometimes a single application will afford relief.

DAVID AND JONATHAN.—In the case in which you refer the cause of offence on both sides have been comparatively petty, and the quarrel in question once made up will never, we think, be reopened.

ONE IN TROUBLE.—We fear there is no cure for the affliction, as it seems to proceed from some organic defect; you may have sustained accident, or there may have been weakness from birth.

STR.—A red sunset forbids dry weather, because it indicates that the air towards the west, from which quarter rain may generally be expected, contains little moisture.

INDIGNANT.—She cannot compel her late mistress to give her a character; but should the mistress give a bad one without just ground an action for damages may be brought against her.

H. G.—Apply to your nearest florist or professional gardener for the name of some of the powders that are sprinkled on fruit trees and vegetables to keep insects away.

ADOLE.—To make potatoes mealy they must be taken from the water and drained as soon as they can be readily pierced with a fork, covered with a towel, and kept hot for fifteen minutes.

HEARD IN THE SONG OF THE SEA.

RECLINING in deep forest shades I hear
 The wash of mighty waters sounding near;
 The voices on the beach of mighty waves
 Ring organ-toned through wooded arbutus,
 And hovering with winged memories overhead
 Bring to me melodies speaking of the dead.

He was a sailor bold who went to sea
 And lived a roving life thereon, while she
 Remained at home a fair-faced, loving lass,
 And prayed the lonely years might swiftly pass
 Which lay between the present and that life
 To link for aye true husband and true wife.

Days came and went, grew into months and years,
 Oft marked with smiles, but oftener with tears;
 And one dread night, when angry tropic seas
 Were lashed to fury by the raging breeze,
 The sailor with his comrades sank to rest
 Where palms and corals watched the breakers' crest—
 Her picture in his heart and on his breast.

On that same night, 'mid calm New England
 Skies,
 Where moonlight sifted in thro' roving screens—
 The little lass upon her white couch slept,
 And through her brain dreams of her sailor crept;
 But in the rosy morn they found her dead,
 As sunbeams kissed the gold curls on her head—
 "A case of heart disease," the doctor said.

A simple story of the lands and seas,
 But it comes back to me in times like these;
 And when the surge its mighty anthem sings
 I seem to hear the rustle of soft wings,
 And spirits whispering with its deep sigh blends;
 Can these be voices of my long lost friends?

DISTRESSED.—So far as we know, there is no remedy that will make wine so affected "all right again," although if not a very bad case the unpleasant flavour has sometimes been partially got rid of by agitating the wine in contact with air, or by pumping carbolic acid or common air into it.

CHRISTY.—To clean rings, brooches, and other jewellery, put a little hartshorn into a saucer; dip into it a clean, soft rag, torn from an old cambric handkerchief. With the rag go carefully over the jewellery, on both sides. Then dry and polish with another bit of soft rag, and finally, with a soft piece of old silk.

L. G.—The Queen as head of the State never dies; the moment one representative of the royal power passes away another takes his or her place, but the power itself is continuous, at least as long as representative monarchy lasts in this country; there is therefore no dissolution of Parliament at the death of the Queen.

MATTY.—To eight ounces of finest prepared chalk add two ounces of turpentine, one ounce of alcohol, four drachms spirit of camphor, and two drachms liquor of ammonia. Mix together and apply with a sponge. Allow this to get quite dry on the article to be cleaned; then polish it off with a brush.

WILFRED.—The ballot is an "entire secret"; the paper the voter marks and drops into the box has absolutely nothing upon it by which he can be identified, and the whole papers used might be scattered in the public square before the gaze of everybody without even the keenest seeing one whit the wiser as to who marked them.

VERY JEALOUS.—It is wrong to make your affianced feel that he is literally your slave; that a bow to one lady is an offence, a smile to another almost a crime. If you wish to realize how small it makes a man appear to be under the thumb of his fiancée just reverse positions, and have him be as exacting of you as you are of him. Mutual confidence is what should always exist between those who are betrothed, and the more it is encouraged and practised the better.

CARRIE.—So far as any dirt or soil on them is concerned they may be rubbed with a cloth and a little soap, then with a perfectly wet cloth, and dried either with a chamol or soft towel. If they are yellow or discoloured, it is very difficult to bleach them. It is said that this may be done by exposing them to the sunlight for some hours; but this is likely to injure the piano.

MARIE.—Gather the flowers in the morning when dry, and lay them in the sun till the evening. The flowers should be roses, orange flowers, jasmine, lavender, and just a little thyme, marjoram, sage, and bay. Place them in a wide earthen jar, in layers, and sprinkle quarter pound cloves, and quarter pound mace on the leaves and some bay salt, say a handful, on each layer, and leave it for a day or two. It will be a little damp; put it into jars and stir it frequently for a week or two.

HOUSEKEEPER.—Fruit, wine, ink, or mud stains can be removed by first wetting the articles or the stained places in clean cold water. Then apply a lotion made of one tablespoonful of lemon juice, one tablespoonful of the purest cream of tartar, and one teaspoonful of oxalic acid; put all into a pint of distilled water (or rain water), shake it before using, and apply with a soft cloth till the spot is saturated with the lotion, then sponge it off again in clean cold water. Repeat till the stain disappears.

WISHER.—One pound of tomatoes, half ounce of butter, half ounce flour, half pint of water, seasoning of pepper and salt. Put the tomatoes in just enough water to prevent them burning, and cook them in the oven till soft. Pass them through a sieve and warm them again, adding the seasoning. Melted butter with the flour, water, and butter, and the tomatoes to it and give one boil. They may be warmed again, after going through the sieve, without the melted butter, and should be served so for chops or anything at all greasy.

BUSY HOUSEWIFE.—One pound salt, one gallon water, quarter pound brown sugar, one ounce saltpetre, half ounce allspice, half ounce pepper. Boil all this together, and then let it get cold; then pour it over the round of beef, and let it remain two or three weeks. Some people prefer to mix the above ingredients dry without the water, and rub them into the beef daily, turning it for the proper time. It is very much approved for keeping a good colour. What probably makes fine beef hard is the boiling of it. Put it in boiling or hot water to boil for about five minutes, and then draw the pot to the side of the fire only to simmer after that.

MOTHER'S HELP.—Make a strong pickle with salt, about two pounds to one gallon of water; it should float a potato; the length of time the herrings remain in this pickle is from one or two hours up to a day and night; it depends on the time they are to be kept; they are then hung up in a smokehouse or place and smoked; the time for that depends on the construction of the smokehouse; they may keep a fortnight, but in that case are well salted; four days or a week is long enough to keep them; they are not packed, but put in pairs in small boxes to use quickly; saltpetre, it seems, is not much used now; only salt.

MACARONI.—Boil the macaroni three-quarters of an hour in water well salted, and then drain through the colander. Make a sauce with some butter, a little ham and chickens' livers chopped fine and enough flour to thicken it; cook this about five minutes till coloured; then add half a cup of soup stock, a little tomato and more butter, and take it off from the fire. Put a layer of the macaroni on a large platter, cover it with grated Parmesan cheese and pour over it some of the sauce; continue to alternate the layers until the whole has been used. If the macaroni should have cooled during the process the dish can be placed in the oven for five minutes, as it must be served very hot.

B. H.—Having cleaned the surface of the metal, and made it quite bright, free it from grease by rubbing with whiting and water, or, better, with powdered quicklime and water, then put on the following brownish composition. Blue vitriol, one ounce; sweet spirit of nitre, one ounce; water, twenty ounces. Let the composition remain on for twenty-four hours, then rub it off with a stiff brush. If not sufficiently browned repeat the last process. After browned, clean the surface well with hot water containing a little soda and potash, and lastly with boiling water, and dry it; or you can wet a piece of rag with antimony chloride, dip into olive oil, and rub the barrels over. In a fortnight it will be covered with a fine coat of rust, which remove with scratch brush and apply oil.

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